HINDUISM
for today



School Certificate

by

K. BEEDASY

HINDUISM FOR TODAY

SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

K. BEEDASY

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to

Pratima &

Jotsana

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K. Beedasy

CONTENTS

PREFACE

"A no bhadrah kratavo yantu vishvatah,
Let noble thoughts come to us from every side"
Rigveda 1-89-i

Education is vital to the survival of any nation, and one of the main objectives of education is the capacity of inculcating the practice of values in every member of the society.

"Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages in the world and encyclopaedias the Rishis." Swami Vivekananda - (III.302.)

Thus the role of schools is conceived and

"The teacher's job is not merely to teach facts and skill. It is also to influence attitudes and conduct." (Master Plan for the Year 2000, Role of Education - 11.32.)

If young generations are not made aware of the importance of Culture, Tradition, Religion, then the material comforts may lure them and shatter peace, stability and faith that all of us cherish so much.

Values like Truth, Faith, Love ,Non-Violence, Respect.........are essential for a peaceful life.

The teachings of Hinduism as we see in the Vedas and other Hindu Scriptures have been viewed and reviewed by sages and reformers who have always fashioned them to be adopted in our daily life. I have as far as possible tried to illustrate some of the main currents of Hinduism in this work.

Krishnadev Beedasy

18 April 1994.

INTRODUCTION

Hinduism stands as the most ancient living religion of the world. It is very difficult to give any definite date of its origin nor has it any founder as all other religions. It is also called SANATANA DHARMA, or BRAHMANISM. Some of the most important scriptures of Hinduism are:-

(i) The Vedas,
(ii) The Upanisads,
(iii) The Epics-Mahabharata and Ramayana
(iv) The Puranas,
(v) Dharma Sutras and
(vi) Dharma Sastras.

It is a religion of high thinkers and also caters for the average men. Thus, we see that Hinduism never prescribes any one set of well-defined principles or practices but ordains various beliefs and practices to enable its adherents and followers to realise the Supreme Goal of life. The sum and essence of Hinduism lie in the Vedic teaching "EKAM SAD VIPRA BAHUDA VADANTI" or "Truth is one though sages call it by different names." The aim of Hinduism is to inspire its followers and humanity at large to lead a life beyond sufferings; cycle of birth and death - *Samsara*.. In order to be free from the empirical world, it prescribes three main principles:-
(i) The way of knowledge or Jnana Marga
(ii) The way of action or Karma Marga.
(iii) The way of devotion or Bhakti Marga.

(iv) Sama Veda.

They are the basic sources of all teachings of Hinduism. The Vedas are not of human origin but APPAURUSHEYA and therefore *Divine*. They are words of Gods. The Vedic religion is compared to a river in which the strongest diver cannot fathom and the child may play. The word '*Veda*' comes from the sanskrit 'VID' which means to know, therefore the word VEDA means knowledge. The Vedas consist of hymns or mantras in the praise of different forces of nature like *Agni*, *Varuna*, *Indra*, *Mitra* and so on. The seers or Rishis who composed these hymns were in search for unity and the essence of the *Absolute* or *Ultimate Reality*. In the Vedas, the *Supreme Purusa* is described as pervading the world and is also beyond it. It is associated with the basic law which governs the world known as *Rita* or *Universal law* of nature, or moral order. The gods as described in the *Vedas* were the guardians of both moral and cosmic order.

The *Vedic Religion* strongly believes in sacrifice-Yajna and considers it to be religiously important. In the *Purusa-Sukta* of *Rig Veda*, one finds an elaborate and extensive description of Yajna, the universe becoming a result of the sacrifice. It must be also noted that *Yajna* or *Sacrifice* became the means while *Rita*, the end. Gradually, one also sees that sacrifice was given great importance. It was made complex, mechanical and *soulless* during the age of *Brahmanas*. It was also believed that man owes debts-Rinas to Gods, sages and parents.

In the *Brahmanas*, we also find the origin of two major concepts of Hinduism namely the

(i) Varna Dharma and

(ii) Ashrama Dharma.

The *Varna Dharma* deals with the duties prescribed in the light of man's position in the society which is determined by his character and function. The four varnas are;

(i) Brahmanas,
(ii) Kshatriyas,
(iii) Vaisyas and
(iv) Shudras.

On the other hand, the *Ashrama Dharma* are related to the four stages of human life namely:-

(a) Brahmacharya
(b) Grihasta,
(c) Vanprastha and
(d) Sanyasa

In the light of the duties prescribed according to the *Varnasrama Dharma*, an individual is, according to *Hinduism*, to pay attention to the four ends of life - PURUSHARTHAS, which are DHARMA, ARTHA, KAMA and MOKSHA.

These are very important so as to regulate our life with justice and living with faith in the Divine. Moreover, during this age the UPANISHADS changed the orientation of the pattern of thinking and living. Now, the sacrificial - ritualistic elements were replaced by contemplation of the Absolute or BRAHMAN. Towards the end of the Vedic Age, many changes were noted in social as well as religious life of the people.

THE REFORM MOVEMENTS

This age witnessed a series of malpractices that have brought *Hinduism* to decline. Now the *Vedas* and their great philosophy have lost their vigour, the religious life of people consisted in superstitious beliefs, rites and rituals, the practice of heriditary caste dominated the social scene along with many evil practices that have doomed *Hinduism* - even to-date. This age gave birth to two great personalities - *Gautama Buddha* and *Lord Mahavira.* Both of them laid emphasis on *Ethical Teachings* which they believe would eliminate the evils that, had affected the growth in the *Hindu society*.

Buddha condemned the costly ritualistic elements of religion, caste-system, the rights of religion and said that the remedy to all the ills of his age lies in the practice of the *Four noble Truths* and *Eight Fold Path*. *The four noble Truths are:-*

(1) There is suffering in this world.
(2) There is a cause of suffering
(3) There is cessation of suffering
(4) There is a way to the realization of Nirvana or Supreme knowledge, which is possible by the practice of the Eight Fold Path which are:-
(i) Right belief (ii) Right speech (iii) Right action (iv) Right means of livelihood (v) Right exertion (vi) Right mindedness (vii) Right aim (viii) Right meditation.

For him, *Nirvana* is attainable here. Buddha's teachings had had a great impact in *India*. Undoubtedly, *Buddha* purified *Hinduism* of *Animal Sacrifice* and the evils of the age. He was able to give religion a new scope but

later because of similarities in teachings, *Buddha* was considered as an *Avatara of Vishnu*.

Lord Mahavira, who established *Jainism* did many commendable works to correct the malpractices. He was a contemporary reformer like *Buddha*. His main teachings are centered on:-
TRI-RATNAS - (a) Right faith (b) Right Conduct and (c) Right knowledge.

He laid emphasis on virtues like, *chastity, non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing and non-covetousness* among others. He got success and today his teachings are still followed by many people.

EPIC AGE

This age witnessed a great change in many fields. Most of the teachings of the *Vedic-Age- especially the Upanishads* were illustrated through stories, dialogues and personalities in RAMAYANA AND MAHABHARATA. By this age, most of the leading teachings of *Hinduism* were made accessible to everybody, thus, rejecting the exclusiveness of *religion* to a particular group. This age gave birth to the concept of TRIMURTI - *Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva,* while the Vedic gods lost their place. As a result of such practices many cults rose.

The four ends of life, *Varna ashrama dharma* became common feature of *Hinduism*. One of the most significant elements of this age is the doctrine of *Avatara*. It was also a period of great renaissance. Thus, almost all leading teachings of the *Vedic era,* became popular in a very simple way.

The doctrine of *Karma* became a prominent feature and its treatment in *Bhagavata Gita* is unique.

Temple worship, rites and rituals and worship of ISHTA-DEVATA and the development of *sectarian beliefs* are prominent elements of *Epic Age*. Later we have the emergence of the six schools of *Indian Philosophy*. The *Epic Age* was responsible to awake the *Hindus* and today many of its features are still practiced by a vast majority of *Hindus*.

MEDIEVAL AGE (1000 A.D 1750 A.D)

The Medieval Age was an age which saw tremendous upheavals in the History of *Hindu religion. Muslim race* had already been established and *Hinduism* has lost its prestige. Temples were razed, conversion very popular, violence and many other evils were noted. Seeing the *religious persecution, unscrupulous Brahmanas* were greatly alarmed. Thus, an attempt was made to unite the various strands of *Hinduism* into one powerful organisation, but in order to reach this stage, it had to develop a compromising spirit.

This age gave birth to the *Bhakti Movement* in which *poet-reformers* raised their voice to correct the evils of the age. The most prominent were *Kabirdas, Surdas, Tulsidas, Meera, Tukaram, Chaitanya, Vallabha and Nanak.* It also witnessed the attempt to unite *Hindu* and *Muslim*.

The achievements in this age is quite remarkable when we see that "*Rama Charit- Manas*" became a masterpiece of that period and today it is still revered. We also have *Surdas, Kabir* and *Chaitanya* who still serve as an

inspiration in our age.

MODERN AGE (1750 AD)

Muslim rule has already weakened; *British rule* started growing weak and *Hinduism* was in a period of great decadence. Under such a weakened *India* that *Ram Mohun Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Devendranath Tagore, Swami Dayananda, Mahatma Gandhi* and *Ramakrishna Paramhansa* brought light and hope in *Hinduism*. Institutions like *Brahmo Samaj* and *Arya Samaj* made commendable works to eliminate the evils. What is important is that all of them inspite of showing different colours in their application and endeavour had only one goal - that is to purify *Hinduism* from all its impurities.

Brahmo Samaj believed in the *Vedic Authority* especially *Upanishads*, but was open to *Western culture* and *religion*. It achieved success in the social fields, and roused the *orthodox Hindus* to be conscious of their rich cultural heritage. It aimed at eliminating *caste system, giving a better position to the women* and *make education accessible to everybody.*

The *Arya Samaj* used the *Vedas* as its basis and formulated all its teachings on them. *Swami Dayananda* laid emphasis on the practice of YAJNA - *sacrifice*, and was against the *Pauranika practices*. He believed in *one God*, revived the practice of *Samskaras - Sacraments*, gave the *low-class a better status*, and opened Vedic schools where both boys and girls were given educational facilities. Some of the main features of *Arya Samaj* are *Shuddhi, Sangathan* and *a rational system of education*.

Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps one of the most important persons that shaped and fashioned the destiny of *India* and *Hinduism* with his practical and social reforms. He popularised all the central teachings of *Hinduism* but his core principles remain *Truth, Non-violence* and *Satyagraha*. For him *Niskama Karma* and the *protection of cow* are equally important. Under him, we see that *Hinduism* became broad, tolerant and open, ensuring its universal approach.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa, is perhaps the only person who has been able to prove that the *Vedic teaching "Ekam Sad Vipra Bahuda Vadanti"* - *"Truth is one, though sages call it by different names"* is practical and can be realised by any one - Thus, he believed in the *Saguna - Personal* and *Nirguna - Impersonal aspects of God*. For him, *realisation*, which can be attained by anyone, need to be practiced under certain conditions. In his opinion both *householder* and the *hermit* are equally important. His main form of worship was concentrated in *Mother Kali*.

Thus, we see that *Hinduism* has been evolving and inspite of so many upheavals and conflicts it has experienced, it has never lost its vigour and vitality. It still holds men to sublimity and will continue to play a positive role in the history of mankind for its teachings based on *non-violence, peace, truth, renunciation and disinterested action.*

I have covered the syllabus of the School Certificate. I hope that teachers and students will find it benefitial. I also wish that the large majority of readers find it useful to have a glance at some of the major teachings of Hinduism.

THE UPANISHADS

The place which the *Upanishads* occupy is unique in *Hinduism*. The word *Upanishad* comes from the root *Sad* which means to sit near the *Guru* with *devotion* to receive instruction about the *Highest Reality.* Therefore it means "sitting close to destroy the ignorance"- *Avidya - Spiritual ignorance of the disciple.*

"The earnestness of the search for the truth is one of the delightful and commendable features of the Upanishaads." (R.E.Hume)

The *Upanishads* being flashes of thoughts are *poetic* and *philosophical*. Just as the Vedas, they have considerbly influenced the *Hindu* thinking and the word *literary scenes*. The Upanishads considered to be the most important are : ISHA, KENA, KATHA, PRASNA, MUNDAKA, MANDUKYA, TAITRIYA, AITREYA, CHANDOGYA, BRIHADARANYAKA and SVESTASVATARA.

The Upanishadic teachings have a great deal to give to mankind. They have the ability to guide the individual and the collective behaviour. They have a *Universal Message* to give to mankind at the *realisation* of not oneself but humanity at large.

In a world of re-assessment of man's life and conduct, the *Upanishads* have an important role in the science of the inner world of man. The *Upanishadic core teaching* is "*ADHIYATMA*" or *Spiritual knowledge*. The *Upanishads* are a living tradition to which the world still looks for inspiration and motivation.

As the *Upanishads* have a very rich *cultural* and *traditional heritage dealing* with *Education*, as their primary objective, we can say that the Hindu mind was very advanced in their search for the truth. The task for us today as in the past is search of truth.

"From Untruth lead me to Truth ." Thus they inspire man to go in his struggle to attain the *Highest* and *The Eternal.*

ISHA UPANISHAD:

The *Isha Upanishad* considered to be the first among the *Upanishads* is of special signifiance to all of us, so much so that once *Mahatama Gandhi* said "If the whole of *Hindu Scriptures* are destroyed, but one person remembers the first verse of the *Isha Upanishad*, *Hinduism* will still be considered as the most ancient *Universal, Tolerant* and *Eternal religion*." This cleary shows how significant it is. This *Upanishad* with its *lofty, sublime* and *philosophic* teachings has greately influenced *Hindu thoughts* and continues to do so in our Modern Age. Perhaps, it is one of the rare *Scriptures* that does not have any hint of sectarianism or establishes any exclusive dogma but directs us to the path of perfection. The Bhagavata Gita shows that it has been influenced by it. It deals with what concerns us directly or indirectly.

This Upanishad is unique in itself as it teaches about the uncompromising reconciliation of an uncompromising extreme. It discusses about the *nature of the world, Enjoyment, Action, Birth, Knowledge* and *Ignorance, Renunciation, Liberation* and the likes .Their presentation may be out-

lined as follows :

1. The *Lord* and the phenomenal Nature.
2. *Renunciation* and Enjoyment.
3. Action and Freedom in the *Soul*.
4. One *Brahman* and multiplicity.
5. Being and Becoming.
6. Ignorance and Knowledge.
7. Birth and Non-Birth.
8. Works and Knowledge.

But, all these are ultimately reconciled.

ISHA UPANISHAD

INVOCATION:

The All-pervading Brahman is the full, the visible (the world) too is the full. From the full, the full has come . Taking the full from the full, the full itself remains.

This is usually recited at the beginning of each *Upanishad.* It has a deep meaning and is full of significance. From this verse, one gets an idea that Brahman is above the *manifested Universe*. Thus, the *fullness of Brahman* is seen everywhere. He is the cause, and the goal of everybody.

1. *Whatever one sees in the world is enveloped by God. It is by this renunciation that, one must try to enjoy his life in this world. One must never think to covet wealth that belongs to others.*

From this verse we gather that the whole world is filled with *God Brah-*

man. We must therefore live and understand our purpose in the light of such a view. With the view of the *all-pervading Brahman*, we must renounce everything which is not real. *Renunciation* of blind cravings,sensual gratifications must be our primary objectives. Once the idea of *renunciation* comes in our mind, we must never think to covet wealth of others. It teaches us that we must be honest, pure and just in our actions.

This verse lays emphasis on an *ethical path* which will enable the society to have good and responsible citizens where selfishness, hatredness and jealousy cannot be practiced. It also shows to us the grand vision of the *Vedic seers* regarding life based on *Truth* and *Equality*.

2. *By performing actions, one should wish to live for a hundred years. It is only by such ideal in view that actions performed will not be fruitless.*

If the world is enveloped by *God*, then all our actions must be surrendered to him. Life becomes meaningful if we attempt to spend our life span in the right way. According to the *Vedas*, life span is one hundred years. This gives us a clear indication that in the *Vedic Age*, from all angles, people led a healthy life. Our objective must therefore be to make life very rich in quality so that we may develop ourselves physically, mentally and spiritually, and our whole life must be endeavoured to fulfill these objectives. Thus, life is from the '*Upanishadic point of view*,' full of resources for enlightenment.

The ideas of unity is once again emphasised. This verse was later properly analysed in the *Bhagavata Gita* where "*Niskama Karma*" forms the basis of the scripture.

3. *The demoniac world is always enveloped in blinding darkness. Those who are slayers of the self-Atman, meet death.*

The verse guides us towards a rational outlook of life. Life is not only for the enjoyment of sensualities but must be lived with a spiritual significance. The *Soul* is the essence of our body, therefore under no condition should we reject or forget the soul. The "*Spiritual blindness*" is the root-cause of our failure.

If we are too attached to sense experiences considering them as the most important, ignoring the infinite, pure and immortal dimension of our personality and existence, then we lead ourselves to spiritual suicide. We should not forget that wordliness is the negation of spiritual awareness. The ego and animal in us prevent us to know the true Self: We must therefore aim at realising the *soul* which is *Pure, eternal, free and luminous.*

4. *The self is one. It is unmoving but yet is swifter than the mind. It is not within the reach of the senses as It is ever ahead of them.*
Although, It is eversteady, It outstrips all that run. With Its omnipresence, all activities of beings are supported.

This verse has a very profound meaning. The *Soul* is one, infinite, immortal and as such has no limitation, and therefore cannot be expressed within the linguistic framework. But, the *Soul* seems to be many when It is seen through the limitations of the body and senses. As It is Infinite and all-pervading and although It seems to be moving yet It never moves. Thus, in itself It is motionless, yet It is faster than the mind. As a result of such view, the One is truth and is *VIDYA*, while the multiplicity is called *AVIDYA*.

Neither, the mind nor the senses can get hold of the true nature of the senses. The *Soul* is faster than the mind but yet it is motionless and steady. Multiplicity should never uphold Unity, as Unity is the truth. The whole world has the Supreme Self as its basis.

5. "*It moves and It moves not. It is far and it is also near. It is within all this and outside all this.*"

At the very outset, this verse seems to be paradoxical but if we try to go in its depth, we see that the *Upanishadic seers* had a very subtle mind, penetrating in the depth of all that they surveyed. It also shows how the human mind is limited. *Brahman* is realised only when we can transcend time.

If the many is the manifested form of *Brahman,* the one remains the *Eternal Truth.* Whatever manifested features we see, all have come from the *Supreme One*. Multiplicity is on account of *Ignorance*.

Moreover, the *Soul-Atman* seems to be moving when viewed from the changeful Universe but in its own nature, It never moves. Power is inside us, we have to manifest it. *Swami Vivekananda* says: "*Each soul is potentially Divine, the goal is to manifest it.*"

6. *The One who realises that his own self is not different from others and his own self is the same as the self of other beings, by reason of such view, he does not hate anyone.*"

The *Soul* is the true nature and essence of man. Thus if one can see that he

and other fellow beings are the same, then now hate can take place? Multiplicity is only manifestation and the becomings of the *One Supreme Being*.

Such a deep thinking is the symbol of the highest of human excellence. As a matter of fact, only those who are narrow-minded can hate and develop a sense of separateness, which normally yields selfish motives and desires. According, to this *Upanishad*, whenever such ideas are eliminated then one develops a high sense of BENEVOLENCE and *UNIVERSAL FRIENDSHIP* which are the basic requirements for *stability* and *peaceful co-existence*.

The idea of unity is possible through *knowledge* and where there is *ignorance* then there is diversity.

7. *The one who has realised all beings as his own self, to that man what can delusion and grief have an effect*?

Dualities exist when we are in *ignorance* or when the *soul* is veiled, but when we have realised *oneness* then we are free and not affected by sorrows, ups and downs. As soon as we experience unity of all existences then we become happy and free from *sensual gratifications*. *Realisation* of *oneness* is possible only when the activities of the senses, mind and intellect are subdued and by discipline of inwardness as a seeker.

The first verse of the *Isa-Upanishad* declares "*whatsoever moves in the moving world is envelopped by God*." Thus, it is by LOVE and *sincerity* that we can realise *oneness*, and destroy the fetters of sorrow and delusion. In our modern society also, EQUALITY is the quest of all political

leaders, the United Nations Organisation declares: "*Above all Nations stands Humanity.*"

8. *He, the Supreme One is everywhere. He is radiant, without body, cannot be hurt, holy and without any taint of sin, the Pure one, and can never be touched by evil. He is all-seeing, omniscient and omnipresent, and as the Self-existent since the very beginning he has distributed the objects according to their duties.*

As we have seen earlier, the *Atman - Soul* is always *Pure, Eternal, Omnipotent* and having the characteristics of *Infinite power, knowledge, bliss,* and the likes.

The *Atman* is pictured as a *Kavi-poet -seer.* He takes the world to be his poem and therefore visualizes it in its *secular* and *spiritual vision.* The world functions according to law "*Rita*" which means *Rhythm* or *Order.* Everything in the world is set in an orderly way. He is in all, and is the heart of all existences, as such as we have seen earlier, there cannot be dualities. Thus everybody should endeavour to work in a spirit of *renunciation*. Every manifested being is on account of His nature.

9. *Those who worship ignorance - Avidya enter into blinding darkness - and still in greater darkness as it were, enter they who delight in Vidya - knowledge.*

Vidya and *Avidya* are two terms very often used in *Hindu Scriptures,* but they must be understood from a purely technical point of view.

Vidya - knowledge normally refers to *knowledge of the self* which never changes while *Avidya - ignorance* is used to illustrate the *knowledge of not-self* - or the *changeful Unvierse*. If the first one is "*Amritam*" in nature the second one is "*Martyam*" in nature. Moreover, the practice of *Avidya* means ceremonial piety while *Vidya* is defined as *knowledge of the deities.*

Ignorance can be said to mean *action alone* without caring for the spiritual, while *knowledge* stands for spiritual knowledge alone.

The questions that may be asked are:" Must we work, make the world progress and not care for God?" Or "Must we pray alone and care for work?" The *Isa Upanishad* analyses these fundamental questions beautifully, as it tries to distinguish in clear terms *knowledge* by description and that which is realised by experience.

10. *Different indeed is the result obtained by the practice of the path of knowledge and quite different again is that of Ignorance. These we have heard from the wise ones who have explained them to us.*

In this verse, we get a clear idea of the *Upanishadic seer* regarding both knowledge and *Avidya. Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality* or *Brahman* cannot be possible with a bewildered mind.

Since our main objective is to realise *Oneness - Unity of all Beings,* we have to try to know the truth. But human mind always tries to oscillate between extremes. The *Upanishad* teaches us to discriminate between them.

11. *He who knows, both knowledge and ignorance together, overcomes death through ignorance and attains immortality through knowledge.*

From an analytical point of view, we see that the *Isa Upanishad* is very rational in its analysis. If the previous verse speaks about the opinion of the *seers*, this one indicates that there must be a synthesis of the two. Thus, we are advised to know and practice "the two together", and not one alone to the exclusion of the other.

It is through such an understanding that we shall cross death through ignorance and attain immortality through the proper practice of knowledge.

We have to try to understand the depth of the idea enunciated in this *Upanishad* when it states "crosses death through ignorance." This means that with good works, one is nearer to immortality because work purifies. Helping the poor, taking care of the sick and the helpless, doing social and spiritual work will help to destroy pride and egoism that kill our personality and there upon become a new person. It therefore kills the pride in us and prepares us for a new life of the spirit.

12. *In deep darkness enter those who worship the unmanifest, but still into the absolute darkness, as it were, enter those who delight in the manifest.*

Unmanifest, Manifest, Becoming and Being are core concepts in the *Upanishadic teachings*. Each path mentioned has a definite result which may be classified as limited and uncertain, thus the *Isa Upanishad,* enjoins us to have a good knowledge of the two to attain liberation.

13. *Different, indeed, is the result obtained from the manifest, and a quite different is one that is obtained from the unmanifest. Thus, we have heard from the wise who explained them to us.*

The world of names and forms is subject to destruction. Thus, the one who shows interest in the worship of the manifest, obtains a different result from those who have interest in the Unmanifested principle, such teachings are declared by the great seers.

14. *He who knows the manifest and the unmanifest both together, overcomes death through the unmanifest and attains immortality through manifest.*

The world of becoming - name, form, and action is subject to destruction. This verse enjoins us to understand our role in the society. Thus, we must perform action with our mind absorbed in God.

These verses are almost similar to the previous triplet (9-11). Here they are used to add more weight to the synthesis of *knowledge* and *ignorance* (action), that we have seen in the previous triplet. But, here the terms used are stronger namely *manifest* and *unmanifest*.

The term *unmanifest* can be best expressed as *The Lord in His transcendental state (Impersonal God)*, while the *manifest* is the *Lord expressed as the visible world.* This, therefore, implies that everything, every person that we see is a living *God*, and thus they must be loved and helped.

Just as in the analysis of knowledge and Ignorance, these two terms manifests and unmanifest must never be taken separately but analysed together to have a rational view of the *Upanishadic teachings.* As a matter of fact if we have our mind absorbed in the *Unmanifest* only, then we shall be tempted to withdraw from the world and lose ourselves in the *meditation*, thereby rejecting the world. On the other hand, if we direct all our energies to the *manifest* only, we may be drowned in material rewards and pleasures and forget about the Reality or God - (the unmanifest).

Eventually, the best course is to have both aspects of *God* in mind and to serve Him in both ways. We must always try to help the world in a spirit of dedication to God, without being attached to action or to its fruits. (Gita Ch III - 30. Ch XII - 10-11). Moreover, we must always let our mind absorbed in God (Gita Ch XII.8). By such actions, we shall cross death (through the unmanifest) and gain life eternal (through the manifest).

The *Isa Upanishad* expounds the greatest teachings of *Hinduism*. When it says "*life eternal through the manifest*" it implies that all our actions should be an offering to God. Action normally liberates. Thus, verse 11 clearly states that action purifies and knowledge liberates. This verse shows that all those who are benefactors of mankind are liberated, and says that when action is combined with knowledge, it not only purifies but liberates as well.

Now the question that arises is "What happens when one is liberated? When one sees God and becomes one with Him, one still performs action but with the mind absorbed in God and thus is free. Such an individual is

free and full of joy. In this *state of Inner Bliss*, the individual works in a very beautiful way. Action undertaken in this respect is called *KRIYAAVAN (Mundaka Upanishad)*, such a person is termed the best of the knowers of *Brahman (God)*.

15. "*By a golden disc is the face of Truth hidden. Please remove it, O Pushan (Nourisher of the world) so that I, who, am devoted to Truth, may see It.*"

16. *O Pushan, the great lonely seer, O controler, O Sun Offspring of Prajapatti, remove your rays, and gather up your effulgent - radiant light so that I may behold your loveliest form. Whosoever that great Person is that also I am.*

17. *May this life merge in the Immortal Breath - PRANA - Cosmic Energy, then let the body be reduced to ashes. O Intelligence, remember - good deeds, remember what have been done. O mind Remember what has been done, Remember.*"

These verses show that there is an earnest wish on the part of everybody to have a vision of *God*. By *Prajapatti*, it is meant *Lord of Creatures* or the *Name* given to *God* as the *Supreme*, and *Person* signifies to the spiritual essence in the sun, the *Lord* in the *sun* "*That also I am*" refers to the *Oneness* in life, and "everything in the Cosmos. Thus, the essence in the sun and in man is the same. The same spirit is in all. From, the *yogic* point of view, it is *God realisation* by the great *seers-Rishis*.

Verse 17 refers to a central teaching of *Hinduism* that is *re-incarnation*. Here, a dying man is praying that his life-breath may mingle with the eternal life-breath. He also exhorts his mind to remember his past actions so that he may be equipped in a better way to face the future. Normally, when one dies, the mind is used as a vehicle by the *soul* to take another body. Thus, if the mind remembers what he has done, it will be stronger and more powerful to progress, in all spheres of life be it socially, psychologically or spiritually.

"*What has been done*" is a clear indication of the *Law of Karma* which stands as the central teaching of *Hinduism*. According to it, the results of our past actions follow us in our new life and eventually, shapes its course. But, *Karma* can never imply fate as many may believe. It can be burnt or destroyed by Yoga and the *grace or love of God*. These teachings of *Isa Upanishad* echo the *realisation* of the *rishis*.

18. *O Agni, lead us to the good path of prosperity. O God, you know our deeds, destroy our deceitful sins. We shall offer many prayers to you.*

There is a request to God on the part of every dying person to be led in the right direction. These verses are particularly important and are uttered at the time of death and recited by the *Hindus* the time of the *Antyesti Samskara* - Funeral rites.

The Isa Upanishad is one of the most important Upanishads. It has influenced the thought of many teachers and philosophers. Mahatma Gandhi even said that if the whole of Hindu Scriptures are destroyed but the first verse of Isa Upanishad remains "*Whatever moves ....*", then the great spirit of Hinduism will remain alive.

KENA UPANISHAD - SECTION III

THE STORY OF THE CONCEIT OF VEDIC GODS

1. Brahman, as the story goes, conquered for the gods, and these gods were happy in their conquest of Brahman. Thus, they held, this victory is indeed ours and is our greatness.

2. Brahman, the Supreme, recognised this pride. He thus appeared before them. But they never knew what it was.

3. Then they addressed Agni: "O Jatadeva, go and see who this spirit is?" Yes, he replied.

4. He went quickly towards it and addressed him - Who are you? To this Agni replied "I am Agni, I am the Jata-deva."

5. He continued and asked, "What is your power?" Agni once again replied:" I can burn everything that you see on earth."

6. Then,He placed a blade of grass in front of him and said "Burn this." And he went towards it very quickly, but could not burn it. He thus, came back and "I have not been able to discern what this spirit is."

7. Then, they advised VAYU. "O Vayu, go and find out- What this spirit is." Yes he answered.

8. He also went quickly towards it and said to him, "Who are you?" Then Vayu replied: "I am Vayu and I am Matirishvan."

9. He asked: "Show me the power you have." Then Vayu answered, "I can blow off everything that is on earth."

10. Then He placed before him a blade of grass and said "Blow it off." Vayu went to it with all its speed but unfortunately could not blow it off.. He returned and said:"I have not been able to look for the nature of its spirit."

11. Then, they said to Indra: "O Maghavan, find out what is the nature of this spirit." Yes , he replied. He went quickly to it but it disappeared.

12. Indra, met a most charming and attractive lady, from the domain of the sky, called Uma, daughter of Himavat and asked her "What is the nature of this spirit?"

SECTION IV
BRAHMAN, THE SOURCE OF ALL KNOWLEDGE IS THE BEST

1. She answered: "This is Brahman, the only ONE and in the victory of Brahman, is your glory indeed." It is then only that Indra recognised that

it was no other than Brahman.

2. Therefore, all the gods namely, Agni, Vayu, and Indra, are the Supreme, for they saw Brahman and they were the first to recognise Brahman.

3. Therefore, Indra is the best of all other forms of divinities. It is He who came into contact with Brahman and recognised the true nature of Brahman.

CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD - CHAPTER VI-SECTION I

1. AUM. The father of Shwetaketu Aruneya, advised him with the following: " Live like a religious celibate, my dear son, as it is our family tradition to acquire the knowledge of the Vedas, and remain a Brahman by birth."

2. He then went at the Gurukula at the age of twelve and returned later at the age of twenty-four. He felt very conceited and proud for his mastery of the Vedic injunctions, and extremely proud of his intelligence.

Then the father said to him: "Shwetaketu, you consider yourself well versed and proud, and now you show arrogance." Have you asked about that.............

3. Which although unhearable is heard, unseen yet can be seen; unknown yet can be known?" "But, venerable Sir, how can there be such teaching?"

4. My dear, just as, by one clod of clay that is made of clay is known, the changes are only in name, arising from speech, the reality is the clay only

not the multiplicity.

5. Just as by a nugget of gold, its products are known to be many, the changes are only due to the forms arising from speech, but the truth is the products which are only the manifestation of the one nugget of gold.

6. My dear, just as by one pair of nail scissors, all that is made of iron is known, the difference is only in name arising from speech, the reality when known is the iron only. This is the real teaching.

7. But, I can declare, these great teachers did not have such knowledge. If they would have known it, why did not teach it to me? Sir, please impart this knowledge to me." "So be it," He said.

SECTION II
NATURE OF BEING AND NON BEING

1. In the very beginning, Being alone was there, the One only without a second. Then the declaration was "In the beginning this was non-being alone, the only one. The One without a Second. And from non-being, being was produced."

2. But, the querry was: "How could this be? How could being produced out of non-being?" On the contrary, my dear, there was being alone, one without a second.

3. It pondered. May I multiply. May I grow forth Then It sent Fire. That same fire thought, May I grow forth, May I multiply. Whenever a person

grieves or perspires, we see water coming from fire - heat.

4. That same fire pondered, May I multiply and He also thought May I grow forth. Then it sent food. Thus, whenever it rains, there is plenty of food. As a matter of fact, from food beings came into being.

SECTION III
ORIGIN OF BEING

1. We have three types of beings those that are born from EGG, born from a LIVING BEING and finally those coming out from a SPROUT.

2. Then the Supreme thought: "Let me enter into these manifestations by means of this living spirit and let me get names and forms.

3. "Let me make each one of the three, three fold." Then divinity manifested Himself into these divinities by means of the living self and then many forms and names were developed.

4. Thus, we see these threefold and how these three different forms of divinities became threefold. This, learn it from me, my dear.

BHAGAVADGITA

The *Bhagavadgita* is one of the greatest scriptures of the world as it brings to us a way of life that gives clear understanding of *Reality* for the understanding of our end in life. It is considered as the version of *perennial and eternal law.* The *Gita* epitomises all that the *Vedas* teach. Although written centuries earlier, it has maintained the same influence. Today, *Bhagvadgita* holds a unique position in Hinduism. It is a chapter of the great Epic MAHABHARATA, and is considered as a *"Little shrine in a vast temple, a temple that is both a theatre and a fair of this world."* There is a verse which compares the Upanishads *to a cow and Krishna to the milkman, who milks the nectar Gita with the calf Arjuna beside him.* The verses of Gita have the capabilities to bring to us *devotional raptures and ecstasy* that can rarely be found elsewhere.

Many people have given their opinion of the great holy episode of the MAHABHARATA. *Lokmanya Tilak* says: "*The Gita is the most luminous and priceless Gem. It gives peace to the afflicted souls, it makes us masters of spiritual wisdom——————it beautifully harmonises the philosophy of ACTION, DEVOTION and KNOWLEDGE.*" Mahatma Gandhi holds that: *"It calls upon us to dedicate ourselves body, mind and soul to pure duty and not become mental voluptuous at the mercy of chance desires and undisciplined impulses."* For Samkara, *"the one who has learnt Gita a little or for one who drinks a little of Ganges' water, there is no fear of death."* It also states that without *self control* one cannot live in peace, thus it lays emphasis on YOGA which is the Gita's word for *God-realisation.*

There must be a *constant endeavour* on the part of the individual to be successful, and this is possible if one *surrenders* to *God*. *Krishna* exhorts *Arjuna*:"*Resigning all your works to Me, with your consciousness fixed in the self, being free from desire and egoism, fight, delivered from your fever." (Ch III .30).*

The *Gunas* play an important role in the unfoldment of the personality. Thus, according to the Gita, the doctrine of GUNAS, constitutes the basis for the understanding of the personality. The *Bhagavadgita* is not only a most respected book of the Hindus but it is a *book of universal wisdom*. It instigates man to develop his personality which is very important for our *spiritual realisation*. In order to realise it, it enjoins us to have *self-control*. This is the first step to the integration of *human-personality*. According to the *Bhagvadgita*, the *senses* are the greatest source of pleasures and that is why it asks the *aspirant* to have *control* over the *mind and the senses*. Arjuna is advised to have control over himself at the very beginning. Krishna says: "——————————*-control thy senses from the beginning and slay this sinful destroyer of wisdom and discrimination." (Ch III. 41).*

The *ideal person* according to the *Gita* is the KARMA YOGIN, who has to acquire *knowledge- Jnana*. Thus the *Bhagvadgita* has had a pervading influence in the life of many teachers and reformers.

Hinduism believes in ONE GOD *one without a second*. The best way to describe it is through the negative terms 'NETI NETI' or 'Not this- Not that.' The *Bhagvadgita* uses the same view and declares that the Supreme is UNMANIFEST, UNTHINKABLE and UNCHANGING; neither existent nor non-existent." But *God* comes as a *Perfect Being* to protect

Dharma. Thus, there is emphasis in the Gita on the nature of Personal God but which resides in the cavity of the heart of everybody. *"He is enjoyer and Lord of all sacrifices." (Ch IX. 24)*

In the *Gita*, emphasis is laid on the means to attain *liberation.* This is possible according to it by the practice of *Jnana, or Karma or Devotion. Devotion* is an important element. The word *Bhakti* comes from the root *'Braj'* which means *to serve, to share.* Bhakti or devotion is the *sincere love* one shows to God. Lord Krishna says:"————*-Know you, for certain , that my devotee never perishes." (Ch IX. 31).* In the *Gita,* Bhakti is supported by knowledge for the devotee is humble. The devotee surrenders everything to the Lord. *"Resigning all the works to Me, with thy consciousness fixed in the self, being free from desire and egoism, fight, delivered from thy fever." (Ch III.30).*

The important element needed for *Bhakti* is *faith.* Thus, in the *Bhagvadgita,* there is the description of lower and higher form of *Ultimate Reality.* But, the lower one is also accepted . Bhakti leads to *Jnana* and that is how Arjuna is liberated from the fetters of *Karma.* There is emphasis on action as stated in this verse:"*Even if a man of the most vile conduct worships me with undistracted devotion, he must be reckoned as righteous for he has rightly resolved." (ch IX. 30)*

Thus, *Bhakti in the Gita* is the *total surrendering* to the *Supreme.* It is to believe in God, to be devoted to him, to live in his presence and enjoy his *blissful state.* It leads to the *highest knowledge. Karma* is a core concept in Hinduism. The treatment of Karma in the Gita is unique. When Arjuna goes in the battlefield, he does not want to fight. The purpose is to show Arjuna the *right path.* The Bhagvadgita exhorts Arjuna to fight.

Arjuna is advised to fight for the *world equilibrium*. Thus action, which is performed with a *pure mind*, and without attachment leads to *perfection*. It leads to *wisdom*. Many examples are cited in the Gita to perform actions.

The Gita advocates *union of soul* with God which is to be achieved by any of the three methods *Karma, Jnana and Bhakti*. It also preaches the *doctrine of divine incarnation and non-violence*. It is a *gospel* to life. It has a powerful message to shape our national and *cultural revival* and commands *great reverence* throughout the whole world.

CHAPTER III - KARMA YOGA

Verses 1-2 - Doubt's of Arjuna.

Verses 7-8 - Importance of action - Nishkama Karma.

Verses 9-16 - Importance of sacrifice.

Verses 17-24 - Nature of the Self and actions for the good of others and example set to others.

Verses 25-35 - Distinction between the learned and the common people - Action to be performed freely.

Verses 36-43 - Nature, duty,Desire and enemies of man - the ways to eliminate them.

Actions are very important as action purifies and leads to Moksha.

Chapter III - THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK

Arjuna said:

1. If you think that the path of knowledge is superior to Action, O Janardhana, why do you urge me to do this dreadful action?

Arjuna misunderstands his role that he has been assigned to. He believes that knowledge is better and is unwilling to perform his work.

2. With bewildered expressions, you seem to confuse and puzzle me. Tell me definitely the one thing by which the highest good can be attained.

Arjuna is of opinion that Krishna is confusing him. But the purpose here is not to confuse him but to enlighten him. Work is important; and unconcern for results is needful. Krishna said:

3. O, Arjuna, in this world there are two courses of disciplines that are taught by me, the path of knowledge for those who are engaged in spiritual discipline and that of works for men of action.

According to the Gita, Action leads to perfection as knowledge does, and, they are intended for different categories of the people, but both are

equally important.

4. Man cannot attain freedom from action nor by mere renunciation can one attain to perfection.

By nature we are forced to do actions and every action is related to its fruits but it should be done in a very moderate and simple way.

5. No one can remain inactive for even for a single moment, for everyone is forced to act helplessly due to the impulses born of nature.

As long as we live, we must perform action, as life cannot be sustained without work. Action is thus, inavoidable, but the Gita enjoins us to do actions while submitting ourselves to God.

6. He who pretends to have control over the senses but continues to think of the sensual gratifications; who is deluded the Gita calls such man a hypocrite.

If we show that we have control over ourselves then we cannot claim to be pure and fail to understand the real meaning of control of senses.

7. But, He who shows perfect control of the senses by the mind, O Arjuna, and remains unattached and does his actions properly, and selflessly, he is far superior.

The Gita recommends that we have to lead a life of equanimity and have mastery over the senses while performing action.

SACRIFICE AND ITS IMPORTANCE

8. Do you prescribed duty, for action is better than Inaction. The body and physical life cannot be maintained without doing action.

Here emphasis is laid on action and our existence becomes easy if we understand the importance of Karma.

9. Man is bound to perform work in a spirit of sacrifice. therefore Arjuna, you must perform your work as such,and being free from attachment.

The world was created by sacrifice according to the Vedas, and thus everybody is advised to perform action, for the results of action will be to God only. The Gita advises us to perform actions without expecting the fruits of the actions. As a matter of fact,we must always start our activities in the true spirit of sacrifice.

10. Brahma, the Creator, created men along with the spirit of sacrifice and said:"By this sacrifice, you will attain prosperity and it will help you to satisfy your desires or enjoyment." One performing one's duty well, will be automatically, saved and this must be our objective in life.

11. By this sacrifice the Gods foster you.May they be gracious to you. Thus by fostering each other disinterestly, you will attain to the Supreme Goal.

Mutual dependence is needed for peaceful coexistence. Man must therefore live with the understanding of his role in the universe and never ne-

glect the spirit in him.

12. Fostered by sacrifice, the Gods will fulfill all your desires, but the one who enjoys all these gifts without sharing them is without any doubt a thief.

Here we see that, the Gita lays emphasis on sharing what we get. Hatred, jealousy, selfishness cannot arise if we dedicate our actions to God.

13. The sages, and virtuous who eat what is left from the sacrifice are released from bad actions and sins, but those who are wicked, sinful who cook food for their own sake, eat sin only.

14. From food creatures were evolved, and the birth of food is from rain, and it is from sacrifice that rain comes into being and sacrifice is rooted in work.

15. Know that the origin of work to have its source in the Vedas and the Vedas have its root from the Imperishable. Thus, the Supreme one is always present in all our sacrifices.

Action has a moral value and everybody is advised to work for maintenance of the world.

16. But Arjuna, He who does not make effort to turn the wheel of creation set in motion, is evil in nature and sensual and thus lives in vain.

What we note here is that the idea of sacrifice as explained in the Vedic

Religion and the inter-action between men and gods all have as purpose the mutual relation that man must develop with his fellow beings. Every action must be undertaken to protect the desire and men equally, or else life becomes meaningless.

THE SELF AS THE MOST IMPORTANT

17. The one who is happy with the consciousness of the self, who is satisfied, with such a view, for such an individual no work is important.

18. Thus, in this world, the illumined one has no interest whatsoever for actions that he has done nor for the action he has done. He has no selfish motive and does not depend on others for his own interest.

19. Therefore, always perform work without attachment. By so doing an individual attains the Supreme.

The call for action is noted here and everybody is advised to perform action for liberation.

STANDARD IS IMPORTANT FOR PROGRESS

20. It is by the performance of actions that Janaka and other illumined souls attained to perfection. Thus, you too, you should work with the idea of maintenance of the world.

Gita lays emphasis on the importance of the maintenance of the world-order. Mutual dependence and inter-relationship with the different members of the society are very important for progress and spiritual achieve-

ments.

21. Whatever a great does, the same example is taken by others whatever standard he sets, everybody follows the same.

It is a general view that people have the tendency to copy whatsoever he finds good. In the Gita, we note that the great men are the pathmakers.

22. Arjuna, there is not for me any work in the three worlds that has to be done, nor to be obtained which has not yet been obtained, yet I still to continue to work.

23. In case, I did not engage in work unwearied, men will still follow my example.

24. And, if I cease to work, the world will perish and I would be considered as the Creator of disordered life and be responsible for the destruction of these people.

25. Arjuna, if the unlearned act with attachment to their work, the wise man works without any attachment but with the desire to maintain the world order.

26. The wiseman who is absorbed in the Self should never work in such a way to unsettle the mind of the ignorant and set an example to others to act.

THE SELF IS SUPREME

27. Whatsoever actions we do, they are performed by the modes of nature. But, the ignorant, who is deluded by egoism, thinks "I am the doer."

28. But, the one who has the understanding of the nature of GUNAS and their actions O, Arjuna, knows that it is the modes which are acting on the modes and therefore does not get attached.

29. Those who are deluded by the Gunas get attached to those Gunas and their actions. But the man of Supreme Wisdom should not unsettle the minds of the ignorant who knows only a part.

30. Dedicate all the actions to Me, with your mind fixed on me, being free

GUNAS AND ACTION

33. Everybody acts according to his natural inclinations as beings follow their own nature. What can repression accomplish?

34. Attachment and aversion are all noted in the objects of the senses. No one should come under their influence as they are the two enemies in the way of spiritual enlightenment.

35. One should always perform one's own duty than another's one. Although it is carried out imperfectly. It is better to die courageously by performing actions within one's own law than to follow another's role.

DESIRE AND ANGER AS THE ENEMY

36. Arjuna said:" What is desire? This is wrath which is on acount of the

dominance of the RAJAS Guna and most sinful. Know this to be the enemy here.

38. As fire is covered by smoke, a mirror by dirt, as an embryo is enveloped by the womb, so is this knowledge covered by passion.

39. Arjuna, knowledge when covered by desire, becomes the greatest enemy of the wise, and is known as the insatiable fire of desire.

40. The senses, the mind, and the intellect are said to be its seat. Truth-wisdom is veiled by these, it deludes the embodied soul.

41. Therefore my dear Arjuna, control your senses from now itself,and destroy this destroyer sinful destroyer of wisdom and discrimination.

42. The senses are considered to be greater than the body, but greater than the senses is the mind. Greater than the mind is the intellect but greater than the intellect is He.
from desire and egoism, fight relieved from the mental fever.

31. Those men, who are full of faith and free from cavil,always follow this teaching of mine and eventually are released from the bondage of work.

32. But those who reject My teaching and do not follow it, consider them to be fools and blind to all wisdom, lost and senseless.

43. Thus, Arjuna, understanding that who is beyond the intelligence, control yourself and O Arjuna destroy the enemy in form of desire, too hard to overcome.

[illegible] covered by passion.

[illegible]

40. [illegible] the embodied [illegible]

41. Therefore, [illegible]

42. [illegible] than the intellect [illegible]

43. [illegible]

[illegible]

Ramcharitmanas is perhaps the most important book of the Hindus and appeals to everybody, poor and rich as well.The teachings of this holy book are valid even today.Thus,we see that Tulsidas, the writer has left no sphere of human conduct untouched. It is equally important for the learned as well as the common people. This book describes the lofty teachings of Hinduism which are given to men in a very simple way. Bhakti has an important place in the book.Tulsidas used to say :

" My lot is low,by my purpose high
I am confident of one thing
The good,will be gratified,
Though fools may laugh." Because, he made Rama very popular, he is considered to be the most important poet of the Rama Bhakti School. Tulsidas is of opinion that poetry is one of the best ways to express one's love to God, and this is clearly seen in all his works.

HIS CONCEPT OF BHAKTI

Tulsidas defines Bhakti as "BOTH MEANS AND END". For him, devotion leads to Rama and after realisation, one still retains it to enjoy the blissful state of God. He also held that Bhakti helps the devotee to have a sure source of knowledge, one realises ONE'S TRUE NATURE. Thus, he considers Bhakti to "AN ACTIVE STATE WHERE THE GRACE OF GOD ENLIGHTENS THE AGENT"; it also helps the devotee to bear the sufferings, and it also removes obstacles that can be a handicap to progress or to reach the ULTIMATE GOAL OR ULTIMATE REALITY.

He also describes Bhakti as "THE LOVE OF THE SERVANT FOR

THE LOVING MASTER". For Tulsidas, if an individual wants to overcome SAMSARA, one must necessarily apply Bhakti in his life. He considers Bhakti as the best, easiest, simplest and the most direct way to God Realisation. Eventually, he made Bhakti to be very simple and declared that it is open to all. Tulsidas, successfully proved the efficacy of devotion in Ram-Charit-Manas when he portrays Sabari as the staunchest of all devotees. The nine forms of devotion, propounded by Rama is a significant development of the teaching and practice of Bhakti. These forms are:

1) Cultivation of the company of Sadhus
2) Service to the feet of the Guru
3) Deep interest in the lila of the Lord
4) Singing the glory of God
5) Nama-Japa-The repetition of the name and strong faith in the Lord
6) Practice of self control fostering the spirituality of renunciation and craving for virtuous life
7) To regard the whole world as permeated by God and to regard the saint even more than God
8) Contentment with whatever one gets and not finding faults with others
9) Dependence on the Lord, simplicity, freedom from all wile and no elation or depression

While elucidating on the importance of Bhakti, Tulsidas lays great emphasis on simple, pure and easy conduct. He holds that the society will benefit a lot from such values. He was aware of the problems that were affecting the Hindu society during his age, thus, he believed that these values will no doubt eliminate confusions. Eventually, he attained success in his undertakings. Many social, cultural and spiritual lethargy that had

doomed the Hindu society were gradually eliminated. Tulsidas realised the importance of Bhakti, and he declares that to attain Bhakti, one must necessarily free oneself from Pride, Egoism and All Negative Attitudes. He speaks of Bhakti as - " A STATE OF MIND CHARACTERISED BY ACTIVE AND INTENSE DEVOTION TO RAMA". Thus, for him Bhakti involves an emotional attachment to Saguna God. He also states that Bhakti is - "The love of the servant for the loving master." His aim is to "narrate the great deeds of Rama." In the specified portion devotion becomes more dynamic with the role played by Maricha, Jatayu, Sabari, Kabundha, Narada, Lakshmana and even Ravana.

NATURE OF BRAHMAN - GOD

Ultimate reality, is variously interpreted and pictured in Hindu philosophy. It satisfies the mind of different categories of people. Thus, in Hinduism, Ultimate Reality, is explained to be both Nirguna and Saguna. In Tulsi's philosophy, Bhakti is the means to realise God and Tulsidas says that Bhakti involves an emotional attachment to Saguna God, yet in order to achieve Paramartha, the highest goal of life, one has to transcend the Saguna aspect of God and has to realise his Nirguna state. Thus, we see that in his teachings there is no difference between both as he says - AGUNATIN SAGUNATIN NAHIN KACHU BHEDA"

For him both forms are important. Rama symbolizes both forms and to this effect, Tulsidas makes a passionate appeal to men to devote themselves to the worship of Rama. Eventually, for him, no one can take the place of Rama, because He is compassionate, powerful and is full of tender feelings for his devotees.

His Rama is the absolute incarnate in history, the Eternal descending into time. The Ram-Charit-Manas presents a synthesis of the Upanisads, Gita and Vedanta philosophy. Tulsidas used the word Maya in his Ramcharitmanas. For him, Maya is the inexplicable nature of woman who is the very manifestation of maya. He declares that a Saint or Philosopher gets charmed by her fawn-like eyes and moon bright face and succumbs to her power of infatuation. Sometimes, Maya denotes the supernatural powers of demons. He often compares it to a dancing - woman. For Tulsidas, Bhakti is very essential but Maya is a mere dancing-girl.

Tulsidas describes Brahman in both negative and positive forms. He also pictures the UNQUALIFIED and QUALIFIED Brahman. The basic concept of Upanisad NETI-NETI is vividly analysed by him. He thus tries to strengthen his arguments by giving some arguments and declares that the Absolute is UNKNOWABLE, INVISIBLE, UNCREATED, INCOMPARABLE, INVISIBLE, and CHANGELESS. So long as one is entangled in Maya, Brahman or the Supreme Being cannot be known.

For Tulsidas, the Supreme is all-pervading, blissful and is all-knowing. He transcends the opposites, He is all-merciful and most gracious. Illustrating the nature of Brahman and His qualities, he says:

"Though, you are Brahman-
"invisible, eternal, knowable, by intuitions
I know and describe you as such,
Yet repeatedly I adore
your Character as Saguna."

Tulsidas has always considered himself as the lowest of all. For him, Rama is the great compassionate one, whose grace helps the devotee to get rid of

BHAGVADGITA CHAPTER IX

CREATION AND THE PLAY OF GOD

Verses 1 - 6 - Importance of knowledge JNANA described and analysed.

Verses 7 -10 - The Creation of the world.

Verses 11-15 - Qualities of divine persons and description of persons of demoniac predominance.

Verses 16 -19 - God —Soul and Beings. Glory of God.

Verses 20-25 - Worship —in its different forms - and its results.

Verses 26-28 - Significance of the path of devotion practised disinterestedly.

Verses 29-34 - Worship and Realisation.

Lord Krishna said:

1. To you who cannot decide, I am going to unfold the secret of wisdom which is combined with knowledge knowing of which will free you from the worldly existence - attachment.

sins. The only way to escape from the phenomenal world is to surrender to Rama, the Supreme One. For him, Rama is the friend of the lowly. He holds that one must always be devoted to Rama.

There is no doubt to say that Tulsidas, has moulded the life of the Hindus and revived the lost practices of the Aryan-Vedic culture.

2. The knowledge of Divinity in its both forms Nirguna and Saguna is sovereign. It is sovereign secret, the holiest and the best which is realised by direct experience, and very easy, practical and imperishable.

3. Those who do not have faith in this path, fails to reach me, O Arjuna and comes back again and again in the snare of death.

God and His Incarnate form

4. The universe is permeated by Me in the unmanifested form. Everything rests on Me but I do not abide by them.

5. Beings do not abide in Me, do not behold my wonderful power of Yoga. But My spirit sustains every being and is the very source of everybody, yet My self never dwells in them.

6. Just as the mighty air moves everywhere ever remains in the etheric space, in the same way all beings abide in Me.

7. Arjuna, all beings enter back to My nature at the end of dissolution and at the beginning of Creation , I send them forth again.

8. Taking into account of My nature I send beings again and again, according to the Karmas, being subject to Prakriti.

9. O Arjuna, yet all these works do not bind me, as I am unattached to these actions, being seated indifferently in all beings.

10. Nature manifests itself in the whole creation sentient and insentient beings, under my guidance, and by this act, O Arjuna the world moves.

Significance of devotion - and benefits from Lower and Higher devotion

11. The Ignorant, in their human body, reject Me as they do not know my

higher nature as the Supreme Lord.

12. Such persons with bewildered mind, vain hopes, their knowledge vain, are devoid of judgement.

13. But O Arjuna, great souls who understand my divine nature know me as the imperishable source of all existence, worship me with single-minded and uninterrupted devotion.

14. Always singing-chanting My name, and greatness, making effort for My realisation, bowing to Me with great devotion and worship Me in discipline.

15. Others worship Me with knowledge as one, as the distinct and My universal form in all directions.

16. I am the Vedic ritual, I am the sacrifice, I am the ancestral offering, I am the medicinal herb as well as I am the mystic hymn, I am the clarified butter, I am the Fire and I am also the oblation.

i7. I am the Supreme, I am the father of the world, the mother, the grandfather, I am the object of knowledge, I am the sacred syllable OM, and I am also the Rig, the Sama and the Yajur.

18. I am the Supreme goal, the supporter, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the refuge, and the friend. I am also the origin and the end, the resting place and ground and the imperishable seed.

19. I give heat and I hold back and send forth rain. O Arjuna, I am immortality as well as death I am also being and non-being.

20. Those who know the three Vedas and the paths laid down in them, drink the Soma juice and their sin purged, worship Me with sacrifices and pave the way for the heavenly pleasures. They attain the holy world of Indra and enjoy the blissful nature of gods.

21. Having enjoyed the pleasures of the heaven, they come back to the world of mortal beings, when their merits are exhausted, all these according to the teachings of the Vedas and seeking worldly enjoyments, they obtain the the changeable.

22. But the devotees who show their love and devotion to Me with an undistracted mind, I bring security in what they have and attend to their needs.

23. O Arjuna, those who worship other gods, but with faith, sincerity, still worship Me alone, though in a mistaken way.

24. I am thus, the enjoyer and the Lord of all sacrifices. But they do not know Me in reality and fall.

25. Worshippers of gods go to the gods, those who are devoted to manes go to manes and those who show adoration to the spirits go to the spirits but those who worship Me come to Me alone.

Results of Devotion

26. Whosoever offers to Me with love a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even water, the one offered with love and with pure heart only I accept.

27. Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer, whatever you donate, whatever penance you do, O Arjuna, do that as an offering to Me.

28. With your mind free from the results of the nature of actions (good or bad), you shall be free with your mind concentrated in the path of renun-

ciation, you shall be free from their consequences and will therefore attain Me.

29. I am the same in all beings. There is none hateful or dear to Me. But, those who worship Me with single-minded and interrupted devotion, they are in Me and I am therefore in them.

30 Only then one should be considered as a perfect one as he is now right in his action.

31. Thus, very quickly he becomes a virtuous one and obtains lasting peace. O Arjuna, know it for certain, My devotee never perishes.

32. O Arjuna, though they are women, vaisyas, shudras, or the lowly born, if they take refuge in Me alone, they also attain the Supreme State.

33. How much more, then holy Brahmanas, royal saints with their devotion, having obtained the impermanent sorrowful world, constantly worship Me.

34. Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me, show your reverence to Me with great discipline you shall come to Me.

LORD VISHNU AND HIS AVATARAS

As one of the oldest living religion, Hinduism satisfies both high thinkers as well as ordinary people. Thus, if the former can conceive God as Impersonal -Nirguna - , that is without names and forms; the latter can only think of Him as Personal - Saguna , with names and forms. Both forms have their place in Hinduism because of its tolerance. Thus, it teaches its followers to adapt themselves and to rise gradually or quickly to God, who is always calling them to Him. The worship depends on the capacity of the devotees. Yet, God is conceived as one though He is known under different names, and possessing different attributes. The Rg veda says:-

"Truth is one though sages call it by different names".

In the course of its long history, God has been addressed in many ways and multiple forms. The Hindu Triad Trimurti consists of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh or Shiva.
Brahma is the Creator, Vishnu, the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer or the Rejuvenator. They represent God in His creating, preserving and rejuvenating aspects. Gradually, the names of these Gods have been identified with others, for example, Vishnu is very often identified as Vasudeva, and Narayana ...

VISHNU

Vishnu comes from the root 'Vish' which means 'to pervade', that is, Vishnu is all-pervading. Lord Vishnu is a Vedic God. His devotees reverently believe that he is the origin of the Universe and of everything. According to one of the most famous cosmic myths of Hinduism, he sleeps in the primeval ocean, on the thousand-headed snake Sesa (sesa naag). In his sleep, a lotus grows from his navel, and in the lotus is born Brahma, the creator. Once the world is created, Vishnu awakes to reign in the highest heaven known as Vaikuntha for the Vaishnavas.
"He is usually portrayed as a four-armed man of dark blue colour, crowned and seated on his throne, bearing in his hands the emblems, the conch, discus, mace and lotus, wearing the holy jewel called Kaustubha round his neck, and with a tuft of curly hair on his chest." He rides the great eagle Garuda, and his spouse is Laxmi, the goddess of prosperity.

In the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter X), he is given the status of a Universal God. "I am the self seated in the inmost hearts of all that are born ..... I am their beginning, their middle, and their end... I am the beginning, the middle, the end, of all creation ... I am unending time ..... I am destroying death ..."

Unlike Siva who is sometimes terrible, Vishnu is portrayed as wholly benevolent. He works for the welfare of the world, and for this reason he incarnates himself. As he says in the Gita:

"Though unborn and imperishable, I come into being through my power (Maya). Whenever there is a decline of righteousness (dharma) and a rise of unrighteousness, I incarnate myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness (dharma) I come into being from age to age." (IV. 6-8)

The Avataras of Vishnu

According to tradition, Vishnu has many Avataras but these ten are most important: Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-lion, Dwarf, Rama with the axe, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Kalkin. An incarnation might be total or partial. A partial avatara is described as any good or great man "endowed with glory , grace and vigour" and therefore "sprung from a fragment of my splendour." (Gita X. 41). But, these ten incarnations are special, for in them Vishnu has taken full form to save the world. Their study reminds us of the scientist's theory of the evolution of man.

1. The Fish (Matsya)

When the earth was overwhelmed by a universal flood, Vishnu took the form of a fish, warned Manu, the first man, of the impending danger, and carried him together with his family and the seven great sages (rsis) in a ship fastened to a horn on his head. He also saved the Vedas from the flood. The Fish incarnation, told by this legend, was never widely worshipped. Its description varies in the Puranas.

2. The Tortoise (Kurma)

In the flood were lost many divine, including the ambrosia (amrta), which the gods used to preserve their youth. Vishnu took the forms of a giant tortoise and dived to the bottom of the cosmic ocean. On his back the gods placed the mountain Mandara round which they twined the divine snake Vasuki. Pulling the snake, the gods churned the ocean from which arose the ambrosia and the other treasures, including the goddess Laksmi. This incarnation too was not so important.

3. The Boar (Varaha)
A demon, Hiranyaksa, plunged the earth once more into the depths of the cosmic ocean. Vishnu took the form of an enormous boar, killed the demon, and raised the earth on his tusk. This incarnation is popular in some parts of India.

4. The Man-Lion (Narasimha)
Another demon, Hiranyakasipu, had obtained from Brahma, the Creator, a boon ensuring that he could not be killed either by day or night by god, man or beast. Thus protected, he compelled people to worship him as god. He persecuted gods and men, including his own pious son Prahlada, who was a devotee of Vishnu. Answering Prahlada's call for help, Vishnu burst from a pillar in the palace of sunset, when it was neither night nor day, in a form half man half lion, and slew Hiranyakasipu. This incarnation, recalled during the Holi festival, got some worship.
According to tradition, these four incarnations have appeared in Satya-yuga.

5. The Dwarf (Vamana)
The origin of this incarnation is `the three strides' mentioned in the Rig Veda. A demon, named Bali, became master of the world. He started on

a rigorous course of asceticism who increased his supernatural power to such a degree that he threatened the very existence of the gods. Alarmed they asked the help of Vishnu who appeared before Bali as a dwarf. He asked a boon of just as much space as could cover three strides. The demon granted it with a haughty laugh. Immediately Vishnu became a giant and in two strides covered earth, heaven and the middle air. Magnanimously, he did not take the third stride and left the infernal regions to the demon. The three steps of Vishnu are referred in the Rig Veda, but other popular elements have been added to the story. It is important to note that these five above mentioned avataras, are purely mythological in nature, the next three namely Parsurama, Rama and Krishna have heroic elements associated in them, while the ninth is more religious.

6. Parasurama (Rama with the axe)
Vishnu took human birth as the son of a Brahman, Jama dagni. The wicked king Kartavirya, robbed his father and Parasurama killed him. Jamadagni was now killed by the sons of Kartavirya. Thereupon Parasurama became angry and destroyed all the males of the ksatriya class twenty one times in succession. He appears in the Ramayana and other books but "seems rarely to have been specially worshipped."

7. Rama, hero of the Ramayana.
He is the eldest son of Dashratha. The deeds of Rama are mentioned in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana which glorify Him. All the legends associated with Him are held in great sanctity and they have retained their purity.

Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka (now Sri Lanka) was oppressing the world. To save the world and help His devotees, Vishnu incarnated himself

as Rama, son of Dashratha. The story of his incarnation is told in the Ramayana. After his education and his marriage to Sita whose hand he won at a great archery contest, he and his brothers returned to their capital Ayodhya.

Dasaratha, who was now old, wanted to give his kingdom to Rama but his second, favourite queen Kaikeyi, taking advantage of an unfulfilled boon, demanded the banishment of Rama and the installation of her own son Bharata on the throne. Rama, the ideal son, helped his father to fulfil his promise, and went into voluntary exile with Sita and his brother Laksmana.

They lived as hermits in the Dandaka forest. He freed the sages, saints from the demons. To avenge the wrong on his kinsmen and his sister Surpanakha, Ravana, disguised as an ascetic, abducted Sita and took her in Lanka in his aerial car (vimana). Rama and Laksmana being helped by Sugriva, the king of the monkeys, and Hanuman, his brave and faithful general, destroyed Ravana and his army, rescued Sita, and returned to Ayodhya on a day that has today become legendary as Divali.

Rama's rule was just providing comforts and happiness to one and all. He was a benevolent king, a faithful husband, a brave leader, and above all, a model of duty and gentleness. He is protrayed as a fine man of dark hue, with a bow and arrows. He is attended by his faithful wife Sita, the symbol of wifely devotion, and sometimes also by his three brothers, Laksmana, Bharata and Shatrugna, and by his helper and devotee, Hanuman.

Tulsidasa, the famous devotee of Ram, describes him, in his Ramacharitmanas, as "the reliever of earth's burden, who is both with and without attributes ....who transcends knowledge , speech, and the senses

... whose very Name wipes out the greatest sins of the kali age" in the words of Sutiksna; and as "Consciousness personified .... whom the Vedas glorify under the name of Brahma .....that fountain of mercy that has become manifest as the very incarnation of beauty" in the words of Jatayu. Tulsidasa considers him as an incarnation of God. His worship, like that of Sita and His attendant Hanuman, is widely popular. Today, he holds a singular position among the Hindus.

8. Krishna

Krishna is the polular hero of Hindu Mythology and the most famous of the incarnations of Vishnu. Many legendary accounts can be found in the Hindu Mythological scriptures. All these have a certain degree of mysticism. Krishna appeals to all of us for the mischievous pranks of his childhood, the follies of the boy, the amorous episodes from his youth, and all not only wonderful elements of Hindu Mythology, but full of delight to many. The story of his life and deeds is long and contains the following main events.

He was born at Mathura which had the wicked Kamsa as king. He had heard the prohecy that the eighth son of his cousin Devaki would kill him. As a result of this, he decided to kill all her children. He imprisoned her and her husband Vasudeva. But, it is said that at the hour of Krishna's birth, at midnight, the guards miraculously slept and a Divine voice asked his father to carry the infant across the roaring Yamuna river to Gokhul. There, the boy grew as the son of the cowherd Nanda and his wife Yasoda - hence his other name Gopal.

In his childhood, he performed many miracles such as killing demons and

protecting the cowherds against the fury of the rain-god Indra. All these, he did by holding Mount Govardhan over their heads by means of his little finger. He also played numerous pranks such as stealing Yasoda's butter. His adolescence is full of colour. The ethereal dances with the cowherds' daughter and wives (gopis), including the beautiful Radha, are extremely delightful and interesting.

The wicked Kamsa had not ceased his attempts to kill him. So Krishna captured Mathura and killed Kamsa. He left Mathura and founded a new capital at Dwaraka in the North West of India. From there he continued to destroy demons and wicked kings. He also played a great role in the Mahabharata story and was the Divine charioteer of Arjuna in the great battle of Kurukshetra, preaching to him the immortal sermon of the Bhagavad Gita.

In the Gita, as seen in the earlier, He is the Universal God. He says :"All this universe has come from me and everything exists in me." Arjuna addresses him as "the Supreme Universal Spirit, the supreme dwelling, the eternal person, divine prior to gods, unborn and omnipresent."

After the victory of the Pandavas, Krishna returned to Dwarka. There, his people quarelled among themselves, and began killing each other. Krishna did nothing to stop them. A mythological account states that a hunter's arrow hitting his vulnerable spot, the heel, took his life. The city of Dwaraka was then swallowed by the sea.

The story of Krishna comes from different ages and parts of India, but "Krishna son of Devaki" is mentioned in an Upanishad. "Krishna" means black, and the god was of that colour. The symbolism associated with Him

will no doubt give Him a very pleasant personality. Thus, the flute is the voice of God; the gopis are man's soul; the husband's beds are worldly cares which the soul must leave to merge in God.

"The notes of Krishna's flute, calling the women to leave their husbands' beds and dance with him in the moonlight, represent the voice of God, advising man to leave earthly things and turn to the joys of divine love." This is indeed a philosophical picture of Krishna's personality.

Krishna's worship satisfies all types of devotees - those looking on God as parent, master, friend, child, husband or sweetheart according to the degree and intensity of their love. Thus to some, He is the father or elder brother; to others, He is the master; to others again like Arjuna, He is the friend. Some like Yasoda view Him as their child, others view Him as their husband, while others again like Radha whose love is intense take Him to be their lover. To yogis, He is the Yogeswara, the Lord of Yoga, teaching the immortal yoga of the Gita. Krishna's personality fascinates all of us. Krishna is the most popular, most complete, and most widely-worshipped incarnation of Vishnu.

9. Buddha

Buddha is considered to be the last historical incarnation of Vishnu. He was born about 2500 years ago (C 563 B.C) in North-East India. He was a prince called Siddhartha. His parents were alarmed by the prediction of a sage and seeing his spiritual inclination, his father did everything to keep him away from the suffereings of the world. Thus, he was married at the age of sixteen. He was given three palaces to spend the summer, winter and rainy seasons and was duely entertained by beautiful dancing girls.

Moreover he was provided with all the comforts befitting his high rank, so that his mind could not be affected by the sufferings of the world, but in spite of the precautions of his father, his eyes caught sight of four different persons that changed his life completely; a crouching old man, a diseased person, a dead body being carried to the pyre by people in tears, and a serene ascetic walking majestically down the road. This happened on different occasions, and each time he was disturbed and his mind worked and worked despite the gaiety surrounding Him. He thus saw suffering, old age, disease and death-meditated on how to be free from all these. Thus, he resolved to follow the life of the ascetic. He left his palace while his wife and child were sleeping, wandered far away as an ascetic, practised yoga for years, and became the Buddha (Englightened One). His enlightenment led to the foundation of a new religion, popolarly known today as Buddhism.

Some say Vishnu became Buddha to punish the wicked. Others say he did so out of compassion for animals, to put an end to animal sacrifice, very popular during these days. Whatever be the reason, Lord Buddha exalted yoga, reinforced the Hindu tradition, taught a path that led to the purification of Hinduism of many abuses, and was finally worshipped by millions of Hindus as an avatara of Vishnu. The position is the same today. This made many Buddhists, who were originally Hindus, join Vaisnavism (Hinduism). It also shows how Hinduism can absorb other religions to it. Buddha's life is a vivid example of the 'search for truth.'

10. Kalkin

This is the incarnation yet to come. "At the end of this dark age (that is Kali Yuga), Vishnu will appear in the form of a man mounted on a white

horse, with a flaming sword in his hand. He will judge the wicked, reward the good, and restore the age of gold, "that is,Satya Yuga.

This incarnation is not very important and is not worshipped. It is believed by simple Hindus.

The ten incarnations of Vishnu hold a prominent place among the majority of Hindus.

SHIVA

SHIVA is the third deity of the Hindu TRIAD. As the destroyer, He is responsible for the dissolution of the universe. He has many names but RUDRA-SHIVA; MAHADEVA, TRIAMBAKA, GANGADHARA, NILAKANTHA are the most popular. But inspite of his association with destruction, He is equally responsible for sustenance and creation as well. The SHIVA-LINGA is a very common element in Hindu Mythology. Many stories are associated with Him. Parvati is His consort. He has two sons - Ganesha and Kumara.

He is pictured as white , the body besmeared with ashes. He has three eyes, four arms, a crown of matted tresses, the crescent moon. He also has a tiger-skin and an elephant skin. Many serpents are associated with Him.

He also has a garland of skull. All these have meaning only when we understand them in depth.

White is the symbol of purity and Shiva being snow-white suggests that He is perfect, pure and full of light. White basically indicates light or knowledge and Shiva symbolises that knowledge is important to destroy ignorance. His abode is the Himalaya which means the abode of snow and snow is white, that is Shiva is the purest of all, and as such He symbolises the Cosmic consciousness. Shiva is different from us, He has three eyes, the third being on the forehead. They symbolize the sun, moon and fire, and the third eye is indicative of kinowledge and wisdom, through this picture, we know that He is omniscient. As Vyomakesa (the sky or space his hair), He is known for the wind blowing from Him. The tiger skin symbolises that He has subdues all the senses, and the elephant skin shows that he has destroyed all the animal impulses. The garland full of skulls represents the revolution of ages and the evolution of men.

As the great YOGI, He is pure, perfect and full of bliss. Thus, this is represented by the Ganga. The Ganges also symbolises knowledge as water has the property of purification. Shiva purifies and redeems us. The moon helps us to get the knowledge of time - days, months, thus the crescent moon with which Shiva is associated, implies that Shiva is all powerful and transcends cause and effect.

Shiva is widely worshipped by the majority of Hindus. He inspires us to realise the goal of life by his great personality,Shiva is thus the God of perfection.

GANESH

Ganesh is the elder son of Shiva and Shakti. He has many names - Ganapati, Lord of beings, Ekadantin- single-tusked, Vigneshwar - Lord of obstructions; and Gajanana - elephant-faced. He is worshipped by most Hindus.

He is the god of wisdom and worshipped at the very beginning of any undertaking. He is thus very popular for his intelligence and uses a mouse as his vehicle. The idea behind this picture is to show that the man of intelligence has a pure mind and feels very light, so much so that he has the capability to reduce himself to nothing . All this indicate his humility.

He is also the symbol of cosmic intelligence. As Vigneshwar - the Lord of obstructions, he creates and wards off obstacles. He is generally worshipped for this purpose. He has a human body with an elephant's head. This indicates his intelligence, as it is believed that the elephant is the most intelligent animal. It also symbolises the mystic word AUM which is the sound symbol of God or Cosmic Reality. His big pot belly stands for the entire cosmos. He is beaming with intelligence and is the symbol of perfection. Ganesh is characterised by the pot-belly. Hindu Mythology abounds in many descriptions about the animate and inanimate beings rapaciously being consumed by the deity. There is also a snake in his belly and it symbolises the different forms of energy. All these different elements with which he is associated clearly indicate that everything has its alloted place in the womb of Nature and that they are all supported by the Cosmic En-

ergy.

As Ekdantin, he is famous for having used his tusk in moment of difficulties, as he did to write the Mahabharata. From this,we can say that the one who is resourceful knows no impediment and therefore whenever there is a noble cause in question,one does sacrifice.In the picture of Mahaganapati,he is the Supreme Reality. He holds a shell,a discus,a club or goad and water-lily as well. All these are to show his omnipotence,omniscience and omnipresence,the guardian and protector of knowledge and purity. In Hindu Mythology,we have many other forms of Ganesh. Durva grass is very important in his worship.

Ganesh is worshipped on many occasions. His pot-belly,elephant's head and other similar features make him a striking personality. Once all these symbols associated with him are known,one realises his greatness.

KARTIKEYA

Kartikeya is the second son of Shiva. He has many names, the most popular of them is Skanda, Murugan, Subramanyam and Kumara. He is known as the god of war. He occupies a very important place in Hindu Mythology and Devotion.

As the son of Shiva, He is no less than the Supreme. Thus, he personifies Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence and the symbol of overlordship, grace and glory. Kartikeya is pictured as having six heads,

twelve hands which suggest power, vigour, vitality and courage. This picture is only a symbol of His greatness. In fact, He has only two hands but makes himself multi-handed because of his ingenuity. Whenever, we look at Kartikeya with these different features, we see that God is all powerful and if we are determined we can still develop such powers.

He is always depicted as being with all traits of a perfect being. He is a fully evolved person with a clear head, tender and affectionate heart, and efficient hands. He is thus very intelligent and full of love to everybody. As such He is always entrusted the position of a leader. As a matter of fact, He is also called SENAPATI. Here He is the commander in chief of the army. In this portrayal, he is the Governor of the body - that is the senses and the mind. The spirit which gets victory over the flesh is generally depicted as Kartikeya eliminating the wicked.

In most pictures of Kartikeya, we see that he has a peacock. He uses it as his vehicle. Basically, this bird is considered to be the most beautiful bird. Thus, his association with it, symbolises the beauty of God. As such, he is known as KUMARAM or beauty. Kartikeya is always young and handsome, full of valour, vitality and vigour. He always shines with divine beauty. We must always try to achieve this state of beauty - normally called the state of SAT-CHIT-ANANDẠ.

As Muruga or Subramanyam or Seyon, He is the Supreme One. He depicts the courage and forbearance, youth, valour and grace. He motivates men to direct themselves to the worship of Shiva. He carries a Vel or spear which is the symbol of Discrimination and knowledge. Once we

develop and unfold these qualities of Kartikeya, we eliminate egoism, arrogance, conceit and all negative values. He is also associated with a cobra, which indicates that He is fearless, wise and eternal. He killed the demon Surpadam in a fight which lasted six days, and as such He is also known as Skanda. He is also known as Shakti-dhara -'spear-holder'; He is a famous character in Mahabharata and Ramayana.

Tha image of Kartikeya is full of meaning. Devotees are advised to understand the different features related to him to worship Him well. No doubt, He has the same place and respect as Shiva and other gods.

DURGA

Female worship is an important feature in Hinduism. She has three major manifestations namely; Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Durga is a prominent figure of Hindu Devotion and worship. Durga means 'One who is difficult to approach or difficult to know.' She is known to protect the individual, and another meaning of Durga is 'Protectress'. Thus, she gives protection to all Her devotees. She is the mother and the personification of tender-love. She is pleasant, attractive, beautiful. We praise Her for Her power of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe. She also personifies wealth, power and beauty. Yajna is one of Her attributes and is the embodiment of PARA and APARA VIDYA. She grants us both spiritual and material comforts and as such She eliminates all our difficulties. She is unconquered for Her might. For some She is the mistress of Vishnu, the origin of the creation.

Mother has normally three major manifestations - MAHAKALI, MAHALAKSHMI and MAHASARASWATI. As Durga She holds many weapons like Bow, Arrow, Sword , Discus and Trident. As Mahakali, She is pictured having ten faces and ten feet and deep blue in colour. The ten faces and ten feet show Her power and Her Omnipotence and Omniscience. The blue colour shows that She is infinite.

She is also known as Yoganidra. Here Vishnu takes Her help for His rest. Another epithet with which She is known is MAHISASURAMARDINI, and was oppressed by the demon MAHISASURA. All the gods were not happy of the action of Mahisasura and it is said that the Mother manifested herself as Devi. The power of these divinities became Her limbs and the exact duplicates of their weapons formed Her arsenal. Thus, being armed with these arms and riding on a fierce lion, She met Mahisasura and naturally destroyed him.

As the 'unconquered' She won victory over Shumbha and Nishumbha. She is invoked in the 'Narayanistuti'. Here we see that She is pictured as the mistress and the Mother of the universe. She is always ready to help the devotees. Mahisasura depicts the animal tendencies in man which have to be eliminated for attainment for the bliss of the Mother. It can still stand for ignorance, stubborn and egoism. These can be destroyed only when one shows great devotion to God. The Mother destroyed all the demons like Nishumbha and Shumbha. The demoniac forces manifest in men in the form of sensual pleasures. Durga has many hands, sometimes She is pictured with twenty hands. She has three eyes. She holds Discus, Conch, Trident, Rosary and the likes. She normally stands on a lotus; on a buffalo's head and rides a lion. The lion symbolises the best of all animal creation. This may also indicate greediness and lust. If we want to become divine

and pure we must eradicate these features. This is what riding on the lion depicts.

In the picture we get from MAHAKALI, She has many weapons like Sword, Discus, Mace, Arrow, Bow, Conch and the likes. She is also pictured as dark blue in colour. As the power of Vishnu, She is Maya.

Another form of the Mother is MAHALAKSHMI, and pictured as Red in colour. As in Her other forms, She has almost the same weapons. Red symbolises the colour of war. Then we have Durga in the form of SARASWATI. It is said that if Durga represents TAMASIKA elements, LAKSHMI is the symbol of RAJAS GUNA while SARASWATI depicts the SATTVAS GUNA. She is here pictured as bright and extremely beautiful. She is the personification of beauty, perfection and instigates men to organise themselves to win the favour of God or the Mother. Her glory is seen in DEVIMAHAMATYAM, and DEVIBHAGAVATAM.

The cult of Mother is an important aspect of Hinduism. She shows the care that the Supreme has for devotees. The Motherly care and tender-affection She gives to Her devotees are meaningful to lead a pure and bold life.

SARASWATI

The worship of different forms of the Supreme speaks of the broad outlook of Hinduism and also indicates its spirit of tolerance. Thus, the place which Mother cult occupies is indicative of the high place that Female worship holds in Hindu religion. One of the most common form of the worship of the mother is SARASWATI. She has a unique personality , known by different names like BRAHMI, the eternal consort of BRAHMA, VAGISWARI the mistress of speech and MAHAVIDYA, which symbolises that she is knowledge Supreme. She holds a singular position and is worshipped on many occasions. Artists, artisans, and students adore her very much.

As Brahmi, she is the power or Shakti of Brahma. As Brahma is the creator of the world, Saraswati is the Mother of the universe. She is known as the 'flowing one'. As such, she is associated with a river and is the deity presiding over it. Thus, she is connected with fertility and purification. The epithet'flowing one' in an allegory signifies that she is connected with power and intelligence. As a matter of fact, she is the personification of all branches of knowledge. In order to picture this, she is portrayed as white in colour and as such extremely beautiful.

She sits on a lotus and is usually portrayed holding a lute-vina, rosary and book. Other important objects associated with Her are noose, goad, discus, trident, conch, lotus and so on. Her vehicle is the swan and in many other pictures or mythological literature she also has a peacock as a vehicle.

Saraswati represents power and intelligence which is a 'SINE QUA NON' to maintenance of creation into perfect order. The four arms indicate her Omnipotence and Omnipresence. As the goddess of learning, she has a book in her hand, which is an indication of secular sciences so much needed for the management of the universe. The vina or lute shows that we must develop interest for fine arts, as progress. Thus, we should be moderate, lovely and careful. If the book is in Her left hand, the rosary is held on Her right hand, symbolising that all spiritual sciences, yoga, other paths of austerities or tapas come from Her. Moreover, they also state that spiritual sciences are important than secular knowledge. Thus, the personality of Saraswati is full of significance to us all. We must try to unfold and understand them to acquire knowledge and lead a pure and pious life.

We also see a peacock with its usual beauty which is associated with Her. This beauty symbolises that man is always attracted to it and every spiritual aspirant must try to get rid of all attachment for realisation. It said that the peacock stands for ignorance, Maya or attachment or nescience. The significant feature of Saraswati is that she bestows on us the power to discriminate between good and pleasant; right and wrong and ignorance or avidya and vidya or knowledge. This is shown with the swan which has the capability to seperate milk from water, therefore swan associated with Her stands for wisdom and the power to discriminate extremely important for Moksha or Salvation.

The personality of Saraswati is striking and with Her worship, we will not be held astray. We must try to understand all these features associated with to lead a fruitful life.

HANUMAN

Hanuman occupies an important place in Hindu religion.He is worshipped by a vast majority of Hindus.He is the son of Pavana .He performed many miraculous feats. He has a great role in the Ramayana. He is variously portrayed in the Hindu Mythological texts.

Strength, self-control, knowledge and spirit of service are all his most prominent qualities. According to traditional belief, he is considered to be the child of VAYU. He was blessed by Brahma and all the gods with supernatural, invincible powers and immortality. He was once cursed for his great mischief to seers who performed sacrifices. Thus, he forgot everything and his great powers. In this way, he served as a minister of Sugriva but without being aware of his strength. In his search of Sita, JAMBAVANT reminded him of his virtues and Valmiki recalls that once he was made aware of his powers, he immediately grew big in size. He then struck his tail with force and demonstrated an awe-inspiring form which convinced everybody of his success in his mission.

His face is red, his tail of immeasurable length. He always stands on a large rock and whenever he roars, it is like thunder. He always flies very quickly. He is also known LANKA-DAHI for having burnt the palace of Ravana.

Valmiki portrays him in a very picturesque way. He acted as a spy and fought most valiantly. He had the great power to shake the mountain and carry some trees. He also defeated his enemies without any difficulty. He killed many demons, the most popular is Kala-nemi. He returned with Lord Rama to Ayodhya, and the Lord conferred on him the reward of

perpetual life and youth.

For others, he is Yoga-chara for his power as a magician or healing art. He is also called Rajatadhyti - 'The brillant'. He is one of the greatest scholars, and a great grammarian, very proficient in the Vedic knowledge. In the Ramayana, he is pictured as "The chief of monkeys is perfect; no one can equal him in the religious scriptures, in learning, and in ascertaining the sense of his scriptures. In all sciences, in the rules of austerity, he is as powerful as the gods———He is the ninth author of grammar."

He is a highly cultured and refined person. He is a great devotee and very powerful, but his personality depicts a rare combination of great qualities.

Hanauman occupies a unique place in Hinduism. He is worshipped for the sake of power and knowledge. The spirit of tolerance he portrays, is indeed a great source of inspiration for everybody. Hanuman is the greatest and most sincere servant of Rama. All the qualities he portrays indicate that devotees of Hanuman must develop them, to attain perfection and the grace of the Lord.

BRAHMA

The One Supreme has been given many names and forms. One of the most popular forms is the TRINITY having BRAHMA, VISHNU and SHIVA as its members. BRAHMA is the first member of the Hindu TRIAD He is the Creator and is considered as the father of all creatures.

BRAHMA is considered the very essence of our life as He is the source of all that exists and thus He is Supreme. He is also known as HIRANYAGARBHA, the golden embryo from which the universe has developed. Some other popular names of BRAHMA are PRAJAPATI PITAMAHA or VISHWAKARMA. In Hindu Mythology, we get the picture of BRAHMA who comes from the lotus originating from the navel of VISHNU. BRAHMA has his consort as SARASWATI, the goddess of knowledge. As in all the other forms of Hindu Gods or Goddesses, Brahma has many features associated with Him. Unless, we unfold the different icnographic features, we cannot understand the greatness of Brahma. The picture we get of Brahma is full of meaning and each of the elements associated with Him inspires us to overcome our difficulties and cross the mundane existence

The most famous picture we get of Brahma is that He has four heads which face the four directions. Four VEDAS have come from Him. This signifies that God is OMNISCIENT, OMNIPOTENT, OMNIPRESENT. The four epochs - YUGAS are his manifestations. We know that the So-

ciety was created by God and Brahma is the Supreme person from which the society has evolved. Sometimes He may be pictured with beards. As in the portray of other forms of Divinities in Hinduism, Brahma has four arms. This symbolises his Supreme power. It also indicates His OMNIPRESENCE. In the hands there are many objects like: Rosary, Ladle, Spoon, Brush of Kusha grass, Water-Pot and Book. Sometimes, we may see various other objects but those mentioned are the most popular ones.

The Rosary that He holds indicates that He is OMNIPOTENT and transcends time. He is therefore the eternal one guiding us to spiritual evolution. The water-pot is suggestive of the causal waters from which everything has come. Moreover, water has the property of purification, thus, Brahma associated with water shows that He purifies us. He is the cause of all that is created. The other items- Ladle, Spoon and Kusa grass symbolise that men must also perform SACRIFICE-YAJNA to enable him to lead a pure life. As the sacrifice - yajna is rooted in Brahma, so we are enjoined by this picture of Brahma to surrender our being to the Supreme. The Vedas, Gita and other Hindu Scriptures declare that we must surrender ourselves for perfection. In order to reach this ideal state, knowledge is important. That is why we have a book in His hand. It represents the thirst of men to acquire knowledge, as the book indicates knowledge - sacred and spiritual. Man's quest for knowledge should be a balanced one, both VIDYA and AVIDYA are important. Thus, Brahma provides us with different branches of knowledge.

Another important picture one gets of Brahma, is that He is benevolent, all-loving and all-attractive as the poses of the hands are assuring us

of his protection as well as granting boon to the devotees. Moreover, the presentation of Brahma is different. Sometimes, He is pictured sitting or standing but a lotus is closely associated with Him. The lotus shows His PURITY that is He is pure. His vehicle is a SWAN. It is said that the swan has the power to discriminate thus, Brahma stands for discrimination and Supreme Wisdom. By so doing, our objective must be to develop discriminative faculty so as to attain Bliss. If He is pictured with Seven Swans, we come to know that He governs the Seven Worlds.

His personality inspires us to develop aptitudes to lead a meaningful life. Thus, we see that Mythology is full of resources to enable us understand our purpose in life, undoubtedly, to overcome sorrows and attain the Supreme.

KARMA AND REBIRTH

The doctrine of Karma is one of the most distinctive features of Hinduism. It has influenced most of the Hindu teachings and practices. It is considered as not only an essential element of Hindu Ethics, but the entire popular belief of the Hindus. It gives us a very scientific view of the origin of suffering and the causes of inequality of human condition in this world. This doctrine is not a mechanical theory of realisation but is closely related to definite moral doctrines. Thus, according to Hinduism no action is barren. It gives us the opportunity to correct our past actions. Thus, "As one sows, so one reaps," is the call of the Hindu seers. Our past actions normally determine our Family, society and position. It represents to us

the way to attain Moksha.

The doctrine of Karma is reconciled with Moksha. The individual is enjoined to perform Karma as his SWADHARMA. We have two forms of Karma - SAKAMA and NISHKAMA. In the former , the performer of action, waits for the fruits of action, but in NISHKAMA or disinterested action, the results go to the Ultimate Reality - God. Thus, Karma or action is the link which unites the Soul to the body, Transmigration is a corollary to the Law of Karma.

We have three main types of Karma:

1. Sanchita - accumulated past action
2. Prarabdha - that part of Sanchita Karma which normally results in this present birth and is known as predestination
3. Agamika - the immediate results caused by our present actions.

Ignorance is the root cause of individual Karma. Normally, Karma leaves certain impressions on our mind, and this sum-total of impressions determine our character and thus a man is what his character is.

Karma as viewed by many cannot be fatalist. Instead, it shows that Hinduism is optimistic in nature. The doctrine of Karma rejects the caprice of chance as the cause of the life of any individual is traced back to the individual himself not to any other cause. As a matter of fact, if one performs work well, liberation is quite easy.

The doctrine of Karma is a great contribution of Hinduism. It gives it a positive outlook and defines the roles of each individual for the maintenance of World-equilibrium.

THE ASHRAMA DHARMA

Dharma -(morality, duty, righteousness) is the mainstay, of our life according to Hinduism. The psycho-moral basis of the Ashramas is Dharma. In the Hindu religion life is successful when it is regulated by the social laws which in themselves have spiritual significance to make life complete. Life-span, according to Hindu ideals, is one hundred years. Thus, an individual is enjoined to abide by the Ashrama Dharma in order to attain liberation. The word 'Ashrama' comes from the sanskrit root 'shrama' which means

(i) to 'exert oneself' and

(ii) a halting or resting place.

Thus, the word ashrama connotes a halt, a stoppage or a stage or station in the journey of life for the sake of rest, in order to prepare oneself for further journeys. It is also considered to be a ladder of four steps which ensures the growth and development of an individual in a very scientific and rational way. Hindu scriptures lay emphasis on their practice as all of them are equally important. But in extreme case, can an individual proceed from the BRAHMACHARYA to the SANYASA ASHRAMA without going to the GRIHASTHA and VANPRASTHA

BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA:

Education, morality and values are important for the safe and sane de-

velopment of an individual and the society. Thus, this stage has a unique significance for the ideals it stands for. A society which does not ensure its citizens in the above, can never expect its citizens to play their role justly. The Vedic seers were positive in their outlook of life by giving everybody the opportunity to enjoy the facility of being educated by an appropriate individual whom we call GURU or Spiritual Master.

The word Brahmacharya is made of two words Brahma and Charya. Brahma means Veda, knowledge and God and charya implies to go to. Thus, Brahmacharya indicates to go to acquire knowledge, understand the Vedas and to know the nature of God. The Brahmacharya or religious celibate had to go to the GURU who imparted knowledge at the GURUKULA. There, he would be initiated by the Guru and live a life of discipline.(refer to chapter dealing with Samskaras for initiation ceremony).

This stage is a period of regular study and discipline. Vedic precepts were the basis of education, but secular knowledge was equally given great importance, so that once his period of study is completed, the individual is ready to face the challenges of life without any problem. With the acquisition of a balanced education, the student was ready to perform his duties as a responsible citizen. At the Gurukula, the disciples were required- to refrain from talking too much, thus avoiding unnecessary and frivolous speeches, bickerings and backbitting. They were not allowed to sleep during the day, thus there was a fixed time for sleep at night. Moreover, they had to avoid luxuries and lead a very simple life full of modesty and humility. In order to have a better control, they had to refrain from having much contacts with the opposite sex. All these show to us that the Brahmachari was governed by strict rules of discipline, which naturally were helpful to

develop himself mentally and physically and ultimately prepare himself for spiritual realisation later.

Thus, we see the insight of the Vedic seers regarding a proper management of resources given to us. Once, an individual is trained to have perfect control over his senses, mind and intellect, the spiritual path becomes attainable easily. There is no doubt to say that the Brahmacharya Ashrama provided ample opportunities for everybody to get a uniform education and to develop safely.

When his education was completed, the student was addressed thus: "Speak the truth. Follow the path of virtues. Do not neglect the Veda. Follow Dharma. Consider your mother as God, consider your father as God, consider your teacher as God and consider your guest as God. Whatever deeds are blameless, be devoted to them all. Respect the elders. Be charitable. In doubts, always follow the standard set by saints and elders."

Thus, the Brahmacharya Ashrama gives the individual full scope to be developed and become matured properly - physically, mentally and spiritually. After his study, he leaves the Gurukula, and start serving the society, thus, applying his aquirred knowledge.

GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA

The second stage is the Grihastha Ashrama. Once the studies completed the individual who does not want to lead the life of a religious celibate - Brahmacharya, he is allowed to get married, and shoulder the responsibilities of life. In Hinduism, marriage is not only a social bond but a sacrament where the wife becomes the long life partner to propagate Dharma by the duties assigned in this ashrama. Grihastha Ashrama is thus considered as the backbone of the Hindu Society and the support of the three other ashramas as well as all beings.

Marriage takes place after having taken into consideration many important features like the social customs, legal attitudes, physical abilities and spiritual view of life. According to Hindu view of life, boys should be twenty-five years old while girls sixteen years. The householder is advised to procreate and enjoy legitimate sexual pleasures. He has to pay the three debts or Rinas which are Pitri Rina, Guru Rina and Deva Rina.

Pitri Rina - Debt to parents

This is generally regulated by keeping the line that is to have a son who takes the responsibility of serving the parents. By so doing, the parents are assured of traditions and culture to be kept alive.

Guru Rina - Debt to spiritual Master

Since the Guru imparts to us knowledge, culture and enlightens our life, the householder having been properly guided carries the values taught here. He keeps them alive infusing them to the children.

Deva Rina - Debt to God

The practice of this Rina is that the main objective of life remains to make efforts to realise God, inspite of enjoying Kama and Artha.

Moreover, one of his main duties is the practice of five great sacrifice - Pancha Maha Yajnas which are BRAHMA, DEVA, PITRI, BHUTA and MANUSYA or ATITHI YAJNAS. These five great sacrifices are important as they help the individual to rise from his personal interest to that of the entire community, thus rejecting all selfish motives and rising to spiritual practices. Having a cosmic outlook of life, changes his daily habits into care and nurture for every being. Thus, the welfare of the entire society remains the objectives of the householder.

BRAHMA YAJNA

BRAHMA means knowledge,Veda or God. This yajna enjoins that each householder must do his prime duty to go in search of knowledge,depend on Truth so that the endeavour is always the path of righteousness.Moreover,the performance of agnihotra becomes one of the primary duties.It is also important to perform Samdhya.Thus if one understands the use and performance of Brahma Yajna,one can easily perform one's ones duties towards oneself and one's fellow beings.The performance

of daily religious acts not only purifies ourselves but enlightens our wholebeing.For this reason we see that the Vedic injunctions have no parallel in the world.

DEVA YAJNA

This act is that of sacrifice.Here the husband sacrifices for the wife and the latter for the husband,thus both sacrifice for the family.Moreover,the Deva Yajna reminds us that the family is one unit where every member satisifies his fellow members by his love,sincerity,understanding and responsibilities.All these bring a sense of unity in the family circle which no doubt brings solidarity and stability.It also indicates our duty to God by the oblation we make.This yajna destroys the ego in us.

PITRI YAJNA

Pitri Yajna is a step further in bringing us closer to our relatives and ancestors.We are reminded that we have a duty towards all the aged members of the family.By so doing,our ancestors and aged parents are assured of care from the young generation.This yajna also declares that we must show respect to servants equally.It indirectly inculcates in our mind the idea of charity and service .It is also performed by the observation of Sraddha ceremony.

BHUTA YAJNA

This is a sacrifice related to the practice of taking care of animals.By so doing,the householder shows that his environment is equally important

for his survival.This is therefore ,a unique contribution of Hinduism.

ATHITHI YAJNA

Athithi means guests or any person seeking hospitality like an ascetic,student or scholar or any needy individual.In this yajna one's obligatory duty is to show hospitality and love for every being.Thus,everybody is assured to be cared by the householder.

The five great sacrifices constitute and advanced step for the unfoldment of the personality .One transforms one's ego into the welfare of all.Man is spiritual in essence,therefore there cannot be hatred or jealousy towards others.They also show how the Hindu mind is practical and scientific as not only being but the whole environment is protected by the proper practice of the five great sacrifices.

The Grihastha Ashrama threrefore stands as the suppport of all beings.It is the only ashrama in which dharma,kama and artha are all permissible.Mutual love,respect,care,tenderness and such other virtues are the essential features of this stage of life.It also indicates that the society enjoys stability,prosperity and peace as every householder has to perform his duty -dharma properly.

VANPRASTHA ASHRAMA

This is the third stage.It is said that 'when the householder sees wrinkles on his skin,grey hair,the son of his son,'then he must retire to the forest,leaving all his family responsibilities.It is the stage of retirement.At this stage of life,the individual rejects all material comforts,leads a life of

austerities and meditates on the Supreme.

The vanprasthi spends most of his time in the study of scriptures,does prayers and leads a life of utter devotion and piousnes.His experience in life is shared and he is at the service of the community.He has no personal belongings.

Those who are leading the life of vanprasthi are very simple,kind and engaged in singing the glory of God,preparing themselves for the last stage ——SANYASA

SANYASA ASHRAMA

This is the last stage according to Hinduism.Hindu scriptures state that as soon as one reaches this stage,one must renounce everything and lead a life of renunciation or ascetic.He now concentrates his energy to the Supreme goal of life——MOKSHA.

His whole life now is spent in the contemplation and the study of religious scriptures.He is even-minded and therefore is the same in ups and downs of life.He shows affection to everybody and he lives for the welfare of others. His life is now spent in the thought of the blissful nature of God. His life becomes an example to the other members of the society.

His personality is such that he influences others to be good,peaceful and he ensures the society with happiness.His vast knowledge of life is shared to the entire community which derives a lot of inspiration from him.He helps others to have a better understanding of life.

These ashramas as we have so far studied are meaningful to all of us. They help man to rationalize his thinking,life and are helpful in playing a positive role in the world. If in the Brahmacharya, Vanprastha and Sanyasa,the main concern is Dharma on the contrary the Grihastha Ashrama the four ends of life are put into practice. The proper practice of these ASHRAMAS undoubtedly pave the way for liberation.

Although,for some they seem to be impractical in this age,yet their ideals are still valid today if we try to understand their lofty principles. Today,the society faces problems like rejection,suicide,lack of morality,split in the family and many other malaise we are acquainted with but these were practically unnoticeable in ancient India. The adherents of Hindu religion had a lot of responsibilties and were more concerned with the practice of dharma. Slight changes might be observed but the ideal set up in the Ashrama are still valid. Undoubtedly.human race has much to learn from the principles and teachings laid down in the Ashrama Dharma.

THE VARNA DHARMA

The Varna Dharma basically refers to the problems related to the *nature* and *nurture* of man and remains as the corner- stone of the *Hindu Society.* The *Varna Dharma* has much to do with the conduct of the individual and his role in the society. All these had as objective a *healthy society.* Thus, in the *Varna System,* the role and status of an individual has been determined. The objective of this social structure was to provide the *individual social welfare and cohesion, economic stability, political unity* and *spiritual unfoldment.*

ORIGIN:

Several passages are given in the *Vedic Literature* about its origin but the most important is the PURUSHA-SUKTA of *Rig Veda,* where mankind is refered to as a whole.

In the *Purusha Sukta of the Rig Veda* it is said that the BRAHMANAS, KSHATRIYAS, VAISYAS and SHUDRAS have originated from the *mouth, arm, thighs and feet* of the PURUSHA or *Creator.* Here the idea of a PERSONIFIED SOCIETY is highlighted. Thus, the mouth is the seat of *knowledge, speech;* the arms the symbol of *valour* while the Kshatriya's role is to *protect* the people and finally, the Shudra has as main task *to serve* the three upper classes. In the *Vedic Age* Varna Dharma was based on DUTY or ACTION. This System represents the human being as the principle of *division of Labour.* The *Varna Dharma* as conceived in the *Vedas* shows the requirements of a *dynamic society* based on mutual understanding and *peaceful co-existence* among the different classes where

the inferiority or superiority complex cannot have its place.

DUTIES:

The main objective according to Hinduism is to attain *liberation.* This is possible when one performs one's duties as laid down in the VARNA ASHRAMA SCHEME of life. Thus, the *Hindu Thinkers* have assigned various *duties* and *obligations* to the members of the different *Varnas.* Thus, control of *anger; truthfulness; forgiveness, pure conduct,* are some of the important duties common to all the members of the four *Varnas.*

BRAHMANA:

The Brahmana is the head or mouth of the Personified Society. He is a studious and of an intellectual bent of mind. Manu says: "To learn, and to teach, to perform religious ceremonies and to exhort others to do so, to accept alms and to give alms, to renounce the surplus in excess of the individual's need, are the duties of a Brahmana." The Gita holds that," Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, gentleness, humility, compassion, belief in God," are the qualities of a Brahmana. According to BHAGAVATA,'One becomes a Brahmana by his deeds and not by his family or birth; even a CHANDALA is a Brahmana, if he is of pure character." As a matter of fact, the determination of any individual's position in the society is purely on the basis of his character and aptitudes and never on birth as many pretend.

The Brahmana is therefore a model in the society. He imparts knowledge and is considered as the custodian of culture of the community. He studies the Vedas and propagates their lofty and sublime teachings to the mass without any hesitation. As man, he is conceived as a friend, philoso-

pher and a great guide to everybody. He acts as an adviser in many matters. He is highly appreciated by all members of the society for his grand ideal and sacrifice. He is always humble, kind, generous and possesses a host of virtues. Thus, physicians, judges, scientists, engineers and people of great intelligence form part of the Brahmana class. The Brahmanas possess SATTVAS Guna.

The Brahmanas were simple and kind in all their undertakings. People looked to them as the sole motivating factor. Dharma was in their hand and the Aryan-Hindu Society witnessed great achievements in those bygone ages when the Brahmanas performed their duty well. Education was imparted free and accessible to everybody irrespective of sex, class and creed. Morality, virtues and a high standard of living was noted. From all these, we can gather that the Hindu Society was a stable one, full of moral values, economic stability and spiritual progress. Brahmanas by virtue of their selfless activities, kindness, forbearance, vitality and tolerance held the place of prominence in the Vedic Age. Not only the individual served the whole community, but the latter was assured of integrity and progress.

KSHATRIYA:

The Kshatriya is the second important member of the personified society. Another name given to this class is RAJANYA . He is the arm of the society.

The Kshatriyas act as protectors of the society, thus they always assume the defence of the country in case of internal and eternal attacks. Basically, a Kshatriya shows qualities like bravery, boldness,power and

determination. According to Manu: "To protect the society, to govern, to rule a country, to live a disciplined life, to give alms, to acquire knowledge, to live a life of devotion," are the general characteristics of the Kshatriyas. Moreover, the Bhagavata Gita states that "Bravery, splendour, patience, dexterity, to face challenge in war, give alms, live a life of devotion" are the strength of the Kshatriya.

Thus, we see that the arms of the personified society are characterised by their ability to hold and to protect against any attack. A Kshatriya is the one who saves the community from sufferings and injustice. He also protects everybody from fear, and cruelly. He protects through his political rule the protects the country, and has the power to annihilate the oppressers and enemies and rule justly in the interest of the people promoting peace. He is alert and vigilant and is always ready to act. RAJAS GUNA predominates in him.

VAISHYAS:

They correspond to the middle-section, of the body. They are expert in economics and have much to do with the FISCAL POLICY of the country. Basically, the requirements of the society are FOOD, CLOTHING, HOUSING, SHELTER and COMFORTS. Shortage of these lead to chaos, confusions and cause hardships. The duties of a Vaishya is to fight against them and provide the community with the minimum requirements for the growth in the society. As a matter of fact, we see that the Vaishya must be well conversant in fiscal policies of the country. According to Manu: "To engage in business, trade, commerce, agriculture, to rear livestock, to en-

gage in industrial work, to acquire knowledge, to give donations and to live a life of devotion" are the qualities of Vaishyas. They possess both RAJAS and TAMAS GUNAS.

They are responsible to increase production, improve infrastructure ensuring efficient distribution of wealth, thereupon bring contentment and happiness to every member of the society. The Vaishyas are merchants, traders, artisans, agriculturalists, and are those engaged in the business activities of the country. If the Vaishyas tend to give more importance to amass excessive wealth wrongfully and do not distribute it equitably, then social ills result leading to economic instability.

As a result of their determination and their great endeavour to play their roles justly, the society in the Vedic Age enjoyed stability at all levels.

SHUDRAS:

The Shudra is the hardworking manual worker. According to authorities the main task of a Shudra is to render service to the society. The Shudra is the feet of the Personified Society. It provides social mobility and brings about economic stability.

Basically, if a society suffers from physical labour, then it becomes crippled. If there is no healthy, diligent and responsible labourers the society becomes decripit and poor. The Shudras are those who move to alleviate the sufferings of the people and serve Mankind. To make the society independent and self-sufficient, manual labour is extremely important.

Thus, through his effort and toil, the Shudra tries to provide happiness to everybody. He possesses TAMAS GUNA.

The Varna Dharma thus shows dynamism, tolerance and rationality of the Hindu Seers. They had an advanced theory of social organisation and each class was conceived as an important and integral part of the society. The co-operation and harmonious relationship of each member led to a strong and powerful society. According to the Varna Dharma, no one is superior or inferior. As a matter of fact,if one class tries to remain idle, or neglects his responsibilities then the society becomes weak. Thus, the four divisions of society through mutual co-operation and peaceful co-existence contribute towards happiness of all members of the society and the country. The country therefore witnesses optimum development and eliminate wastage. The Varna Dharma ensures stability, social cohesion, productivity and spiritual achievement.

An analysis of the different features of the Varna Dharma clearly shows that the Vedic seers understood the need of EDUCATION, PROTECTION, JUSTICE in Economic affairs and PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT and A HEALTHY SOCIETY. The Varna Dharma indicates the lofty ideals of Hinduism.

VARNA and JATI:

The social structure as envisaged by the Vedic seers is a landmark in the

history of mankind. Equality, understanding and respect were the basic features of the Varna. Later, it degraded into CASTE. Basically, the word JATI is used for Caste.

The word JATI comes from the sanskrit 'JAN' which means to 'take-birth' while Varna is derived from the word' VRI' which means to choose. Varna has nothing to do with Jati as the latter is more determined by family lineage. Today, we have many castes which is based on birth. In caste, everything is determined by the caste in which an individual is born. Gradually caste system became an accepted fact in the Hindu Society. It had led the Hindu Society to stagnancy and confusions.

Many reformers have tried to eradicate it but success in this regards has not been great. Mahatma Gandhi considered caste system as a 'BLOT TO HINDUISM.'

THE ADVANTAGES OF VARNA DHARMA:

Originally, the Varna Dharma was conceived to meet the needs of the society, in which the different members would live peacefully and in unity. It was broad in outlook, rational, tolerant and dynamic. Some of the most

outstanding features are:

(1) Protection of homogeneous culture
(2) The accomoding spirit of Hinduism
(3) Harmonious life
(4) Social stability
(5) Specialisation
(6) Democracy,Peaceful co-existence and
(7) Openness.

Originally the system was introduced to satisfy the needs of the community. The Aryans/Hindus lived in unity and mutual respect among each other. All traditions, culture, language and the likes were all protected by the followers of Vedic culture and religion. The Varna acted as a stabilising force in the protection of the Hindu values, against all foreign attacks. The Hindus became more alert, vigilant and Varna Dharma thus protected the homogeneous culture.

The accomodating spirit of Hinduism is one of its distinguishing features. History has proved that Hindus have accepted thousands within their own rank without any least hesitation. Many foreigners accepted Aryan faith whole heartedly. Inspite of this, the foreign culture and tradition were thoroughly absorbed in the Hindu religion. The harmony and tolerance proved the vivacity and strength of Hinduism.

With harmony the aim of life cannot be successful, in Hinduism, this feature was clearly understood by the Vedic seers who framed the Varna Dharma. Although many new forces came in India, yet all of them were able to inter-act with the others with dignity and peacefully. The Varna

Dharma provided scope for unfoldment of social life and to live with mutual confidence and harmony.

Democratic attitude is one of the distinguishing features of Hinduism. Every section of the society was allowed to function freely within its ownfold. In the Vedic age, everybody enjoyed the same rights in the practical life and as man helped immensely to an organised social life according to Indian traditions and culture. This led to social stability and progress in many fields.

The Caste-System as we see in the Vedic age provided enough scope for safe and sane relationships and progress.It introduced various professions based on division of labour,promoting economic stability,productivity and skilled labour.In many cases,there was a transfer of aptitudes and vocational skills from generation to generation.It therefore indirectly helped to the continuity of profession and skill and technical know-how.The Hindu Society had enough manpower resources to achieve its end.

The Varna Dharma was responsible for professional discipline and honour which are essenthial for the overall development of the society and growth of intellectual power of man.With each Varna understanding its specifity,the society was not engrossed in unnecessary competitions.

As each member of the personified society knew his roles well,he exercised his duty well without jealousy, pride, arrogance,and eventually peaceful co-existence was the remarkable element of the Hindu society. Unity among the different group played a great role in the formation of distinguishing professions based on co-operation.

As we have seen, the Varna Dharma was a functional democracy, for its openness in its approach, we see that brotherhood, greater unity, solidarity and understanding marked the greatness and efficiency of the Aryan Culture-Hinduism. The Varna Dharma, undoubtedly, promoted civic virtues of self-sacrifice, love, service, respect and the likes.

The Varna system was therefore a very useful social institution providing much scope for a better life. It also protected the society from social injustice, jealousy and unfulfilled aspiration. It enabled men to do justice and play his role in the society, thus carefully laying emphasis on Action and aptitudes than any priviledge.

DEMERITS OF CASTE-SYSTEM:

In spite of the positive elements associated with the institution of Varna Dharma, yet we see that Caste System, the distorted form of the Varna Dharma gave birth to a series of malpractices that sapped the vitality and growth of Hinduism.

Varna Dharma provided stability and respect. But the Caste-System divided the Hindu Society in many castes and sub-castes based on heridity. All social inter-actions were considered as taboo and this exclusive element made Hinduism narrow in its outlook and people could never enjoy the freedom and priviledge of the bygone ages. As a matter of fact, the unity that the Hindu society enjoyed was destroyed. Hindu society gradually disintegrated and Hinduism lost its power and prestige and vitality.

With the practice of caste-system, many castes were not accomodated

in the society. Those of the lowest strata were rejected and segregated and denied all kinds of rights-social, religious, legal, political, educational and even spiritual. Many were called CHANDALAS. Some of them thought that they could never attain liberation. The low-class was not considered as members of the Hindu society. This segregation was the cause of economic instability and was one of the causes of foreign attacks in India.

Caste-System led to the most outrageous evil in the Hindu society - Untouchability. Exploitation and dominance by the upper class led them to lead an infernal life. They were not only persecuted but have been thrashed,fettered and coerced as well. Thus the lower class was denied of social status.

Caste-System was a blow to the progress in the Hindu society. As many people could not exercise their rights freely, the country suffered a great stumbling block in the way of social reforms. Responsible citizens were denied of civil rights and the sorrow plight of the low-class was pitiful and disgusting. Talents, intelligence and aptitudes were all unutilised and handicapped the growth at all levels. This anti-social element made Hinduism narrow in outlook. Caste-System could not make provision for low born talents or high born incompetents. The country suffered a lot.

Compelled by the tyranny of the upper-castes, low-castes were easily converted. Thus, the rigidity of castes was a severe barrier to progress. Due to the fear of being rejected in the society, the orthodox Hindus could not accept new ideas for their development. Its rigidity did not allow people to move and have contacts with foreigners. No international trade was noted, thus the Hindu society suffered from economic, social and po-

litical point of view. Hinduism as such could not cross the border of India. The broad outlook of the Vedas was limited to India only.

Caste-System shattered the Hindu structure. Thus, Hinduism and India could not develop a strong feeling of nationality and national consciousness was lost. Particular occupations were confined to particular castes only. In many cases, a member of one caste was forbidden to take the occupation alloted to another caste. This affected the mobility of talents. Moreover caste based on birth proved a hindrance in many ways. As a result of this, India lagged behind in the race of economic progress.

Caste-System is the main cause for the low status given to women who were deprived of education and all directions of their progress were closed. Sati was common, no widow remarriage was allowed and they were more slaves to men than partners.

Thus, Caste-System broke the solidarity and unity of the Hindus. Individual liberty, social cohesion, economic stability, political achievements and spiritual outlook were all rejected in the name of caste. Hinduism suffered a setback and lost its prestige it enjoyed in the glorious days of the Vedas.

THE SAMSKARAS (Purificatory Ceremonies)

Hinduism gives life a spiritual direction by a series of religious acts that have to be performed by most of us. One of the most important acts to which every Hindu is enjoined, is the proper performance of Samskaras or purificatory rites. Thus, according to Hinduism, a Samskara is considered to be a socio-religious rite that helps the follower to have his life sanctified. In today's world, our standard of living is normally measured by our economic or social achievements, but in Hinduism, although importance is given to these features, the spiritual aspects of life are much more important. Thus, every little bit of our actions starting from the purity of the mind, heart, senses,intellect and the soul naturally help to raise our standard of living and are helpful to transcend the material avenues of life.

Samskara means the act of purifying. Thus, Samskara purifies the body, the mind, the intellect and the soul. According to Hinduism, they cover the whole of life from conception in the womb of the mother to the grave. They are extremely important in our life as they are helpful in our physical, mental and spiritual life. With their performance, Dharma is protected, life is properly led and raises man from individual interest to social cohabitation and spiritual enlightenment. The individual is always reminded of his dharma, so that he can prepare his next life in a just way. Moreover, each Samskara leaves a positive influence on everybody who is closely associated with its performance - home, family and community.

Samskaras seek worldly advantages, are expression of joys and sorrows; indication of having attained social status (with the performance of Upanayana); for many removal of pre-natal impurities and the most significant feature associated with it is to make the body become a temple of

God. Undoubtedly, they mould the character and help us to raise above material pursuits. They also contribute in the development of our personality ensuring our progress in the path of righteousness. We have sixteen main Samskaras, which may be divided in Pre-natal, Natal, Post Natal. Basically, at the performance of each samskara, a yajna is performed.

Jatakarma

This ceremony is important for the family as in it the father welcomes his new-born baby. He performs this samskara to pray for its long life and progress. He also feeds it with "gold, honey and butter."

The Jatakarma samskara is performed at birth, before the umbilical cord is cut. Then, the father, looking at the face of the child, gets an immense happiness for he is now assured to repay his debt to his ancestors.

According to Hindu authorities, "he must immediately take a bath in cold water with his clothers on, but actually, the rite states that he must jump into a river or lake. He must, by such an act, cause the splashing water to rise as high as a palm tree in the air." This is a symbolical act which states that he wishes that he should rise to its original state. After this, he is advised to donate gifts and perform such actions that would bring merit to him not now but for ever.

Then the father makes the child taste honey with a thin bar of gold and writes Aum on its tongue. He whispers "VEDOSI" - You are Veda - knowledge in the ear of the child. By so doing, the child is introduced to the Vedic insights at a very early stage of his life . Then, prayers are uttered for his long life. Many people do the same pious acts by breathing

upon it.

The prayers recited on this auspicious occasion are for the child to live a hundred years, have strength, valour, fame and follow the path of righteousness. Prayers are for the protection of the mother as well.

All through the performance of this Samskara, we note that the child is welcomed and admitted in the family. The mantras recited the affecttion of the parents, the child is prepared to intelligent, pious, pure, health and lead a long and successful life. This samskara clearly indicates that Hinduism pays a lot of attention to the growth of the child, the care for the mother and the community is at least assured for the maintenance of the rich cultural and traditional heritage.

Namakarana

This is the ceremony associated with the giving of a name to the child. The authority states that the name of the child should be that which conduces inspiration. Thus, the names of boy should have an even number of syllables, which if two, brings material fames and if four, religious fame. Normally, names of girls should have an odd number of syllables, ending either in ' i ' or " aa " . The names have to be easy to pronounce, pleasing to the ear and auspicious and should not indicate any awkward suggestion. In many cases, names were chosen after horoscope readings or after ancestors as well.

Name of deities like Rama, Krishna, Sita became popular in the Puranika times. The Bhakti-cult reinforced it and today this practice is quite popular. By giving such names, we find that the Hindus have a special care for

their life and they expect it to live a very modest, simple and a righteous way of life.

This ceremony is done normally on the eleventh day after the child's birth. But, if this is not possible, then it is done at the end of the first year.

This ceremony starts when the mother brings in the child after bathing it and dressing it sweetly. Then, she gives the child to the father who hands it back to him. While doing so, the officiating priests recite mantras, invoking God's blessing to protect the child. The father touches the breath of the child and says in its ear:
"Your name is .... " thrice. The priests, and elders do the same. The child is called by its name and blessed. All these indicate that, in Hinduism, the care is not only for welfare of the child, but of the family and its traditions.

The touching of the breath of the child is the symbol of the awakening of the consciousness of the child, which enables it to lead a life in its fullness. Moreover, the sound of its name fills its mind with suggestions that are noble, pure and lawful. The name of the child protects it. It also acts as in a motivating element indicating it to be good, holy, pure and famous.

The Namakarana Samskara makes it possible for the individual to be recognised in the society.

Annaprashna
"As you eat you become." This is well known to most of us. In Hinduism, food is given a spiritual dimension. In the Gita it is said: "From food

creatures come into Being." (Chapter III. 14)
This clearly indicates that food is very important in our life. The Annaprashna Samskara performed by the Hindus is highly significative for their concern for good health, digestive powers and vitality and vigour.

This ceremony marks the feeding of child with cereal, for example, cooked rice mixed with ghee. Its performance is normally after six months, but at times, it is done earlier or later, depending on the appearance of the teeth of the child. This is the time when it is weared. The officiating priests recite hymns or mantras of the Vedas, and the father feeds the child with the prepared cereal normally touched with gold. The mantras are full of meaning and highly symbolical, as all the time the father chants that he is feeding it with things that will keep it healthy.

The prayers are to the gods. The parents' wish is that the child is graced with good digestive powers, pure and pious thoughts and talent. Moreover, parents and relatives make offereings to the goddess of speech and vigour in order that the child's senses, and mind, intellect and all its organs be developed fully. The prayers indicate that from the physical forces of nature, speech comes, and from speech comes knowledge, food and the likes. The wish of the parents is that the child becomes "master of corn." After the ritualistic portion ends, everybody assembled together with the parents bless the child and pray for its success.

All along the ceremony, everybody assembled is reminded that child's need for health, intelligence, strength and the care of the parents regarding the fulfilment with these requirements. All throughout the ceremony, emphasis is on the joy of the parents and the prayers for its progress. The weaning time is scientific, but the most important part of this ceremony is the

association of mantras with feeding. All these are suggesstive of the benefits the child obtains from these prayers.

The Annaprashna samskara is a step further concerning the individual's welfare and the genius of the Hindu mind regarding the moulding of the character of the adherents of Hinduism.

Chudakarma

It is also known as Mundana Samskara. This is the first tonsure ceremony and is performed in the first or third year of the child. After removal of the hair, a tuft or "sikha" is left. This is considered as a religious necessity. Old Hindu authorities state that this tuft is important as it protects a vital part of the head. The same authorities also declare that removal of hair, nails and the likes contribute to beauty, longevity and health. Many changes have occured in their performance in our age.

As indicated in the beginning, from the early stage of life, the concern is on health, moral value and spiritual development. The performance of this samskara has its particularity for the noble suggestions it presents.

The first thing for this ceremony is the selection of an auspicious day. As usual, the recitation of Vedic mantras and other mantras and rites are very important. After this, the father, by means of a porcupine quill, darbha grass and a dummy razor, cuts the hair symbolically. He is enjoined to throw it in all directions. After this, a barber completes the operation. Then the father rubs the child's head with curd or ghee and bathes the child. The child is then dressed neatly. The parents and all others assembled offer prayers to God and then they bless the child. The barber is

given gifts. The hair is disposed of carefully. Parting of hair is very important.

The mantras used can be thus summarized:
"May the child live long past the hundred years; may his eyesight remain unimpaired; may he become prosperous and wealthy so as to feed others liberally, may his digestion be perfect, let him become a Varchasvi" (man of shining energy).
It also helps new hair to grow on the clean and healthy head. The significance of the ceremony is shown by the meaning of the mantras, given above. It seeks (and ensures) protection for the body with the removal of hereditary defect. It also helps for the harmony of body, mind and soul. While cutting the hair, the father associates his action with the great act of God in cutting across material objects and maintaining the eternity of the sun and other forces of Nature. Scriptures state that hair is symbol of material prosperity, thus it has to be removed, indicating that the child is thoroughly initiated to lead a pure and bold life. It is the last important sanskara of childhood. It has much to inspire the child's development be it physically, mentally and spiritually.

Thus, this sanskara has its importance even nowadays.

Upanayana - Initiation ceremony

This is one of the most ancient ceremonies of the Hindus. It means 'bringing near' Guru or Gayatri mantra. The child is here entrusted to the Guru - who takes his charge. He develops the hidden potentialities of the child, ensuring his growth properly, by moulding his character, awakening his intellectual and spiritual potentialities. With the performance of this ceremony, he comes Dwija and marks the second or spiritual birth of the child. By it, he obtained the full status of an Aryan, is entitled to study the vedas, and participate in the Vedic functions. More-

over, he is now onwards entitled to lead his spiritual life.

The child now proceeds to the Gurukuka where the Upanayana Samskara is performed. Normally, he fasts on this auspicious occasion. The intention is highly significant, the child destroys all his negative attitudes and prepares to lead a life full of control; and will now onwards go in search of Truth. Now the Guru becomes his father and Gayatri his mother. Education is the main concern of the Upanayana Samskara.

The age at which the Upanayana samskara is performed, varies because of the intellectual ability of the recipient :

Brahmana - 8th year
Kshatriya - 11th year
Vaishya - 12th year,

reckoned from the date of conception. According to the Vedic tradition, both boys and girls are initiated. Many say if it is performed at the age of five for brahmanas, then it is for attaining lustre, if the kshatriya performs it at the sixth year, it indicates the wish to obtain power, the eighth year is the appropriate time for the Vaishya, willing to acquire wealth. Moreover, the limit for its performance is sixteen for Brahmana, twenty for kshatriya and twenty-four for Vaishya. This must be performed before marriage.

The auspicious time considered to perform it is spring for brahmanas which is the symbol of the moderate life of the brahmana; summer for the ksatriyas indicating the fervour of this class, while autumn is considered auspicious for the Vaishyas, suggestive of wealth.

Of all samskaras, the Upanayana is one that is most full of spiritual significance. While reciting vedic mantras, the child who is clad as an ascetic,

the staff in his hand, is invested with the sacred thread. This, he must put it over his shoulder under his right arm . It is made of three threads each of nine twisted strands made of cotton, hemp or wool for Brahmana, kshatriya and vaishya respectively.

The three stands symbolise:

1. The three debts (a) Pitri (b) Guru (c) Deva

2. The three Gunas (i) Sattvas (ii) Rajas (iii) Tamas

3. The three names of Gods (a) Brahma (b) Vishnu (c) Shiva

4. The three letters forming Aum.

5. The three yogas (i) Bhakti (ii) Karma (iii) Jnana

6. The three spheres (a) Celestial (b) Intermediate (c) Terrestrial

7. The three kinds of ignorance (i) Physical (ii) Psychological (iii) Spiritual

8. The three eternals (a) God (b) Soul (c) Matter

9. Peace from suffering (a) by bodily diseases
(b) by natural phenomena e.g fire, volcano..
(c) mental disturbances - desire, anger...

Thereafter, the child has control over thought, word and deed. The sacred

thread has great spiritual significance. The wearer should, in no case, removed it or soiled it, or else he would be guilty of ritual impurity and thus would be required to do penance.

The child observes Brahmacharya, pledges to do great things in life, serve elders, do charity, protect the poor and so on.

This ceremony marks the beginning of youth. It gives the initiated child the status of an Aryan having as aims

1. to know his religion
2. to lead a pure, bold life,
3. preparation ground for a successful and meaningful householder's life.

The second birth at the Guru's end ensures his spiritual growth, while the staff is the symbol of guardianship of the Vedas. The giving of the Guru's mantra - Gayatri mantra shows the transmission of the spiritual energy to the recipient. While staying at the Gurukula, the child is reminded that his life must be dedicated for service. The Upanayana samskara is no doubt an ideal, and unequalled system of developing character among the young, and preparing them for a full life - physical, psychological and spiritual.

Vivaha

According to Hinduism, the life of an householder is very important. The Grihasta asrama is considered as the backbone of the Hindu society. Once his studies are completed, the student, who does not want to remain a religious celibate, is allowed to marry and precreate. With marriage, a great change takes place in the life of every individual. The Vivaha Samskara

helps the man the opportunity to show his valour, manliness, the spirit of adventure, while the woman exhibits her love, kindness, tenderness, affection, but both, after the marriage, develop a high sense of tolerance, mutual understanding and self-respect. The marriageable age for boys, according to Hindu scriptures, should be twenty-five, while the girl's age sixteen.

Marriage has three objects:

1. promotion of religion by the performance of household sacrifices or Pancha Maha Yajnas,
2. progeny, whereby the father and his ancestors are assured of a happy after-life and the line is continued; and
3. legitimate sexual pleasure-satisfaction of biological urges.

In ancient India, marriage was normally arranged by the parents of the couple, as is often the case nowadays. People took into account the following:
(a) caste and gotra,
(b) horoscope readings, and such other considerations that indicate the care Hindus have. Child marriage was unknown.

The marriage ceremony is normally long, but poetic, solemn, and beautiful. Marrying a daughter for every Hindu is considered a meritorious act for a father, the groom being treated as Vishnu Himself. The rite is almost the same as in Vedic times, involving the following main items, done more or less in the order given. The accompaniment of the appropriate Vedic mantras is very important. The bridegroom, finely dressed after having been previously anointed with turmeric etc.., and attended by friends and

relatives, comes to the house of the equally anoited and embellished bride.

1. Archana and Arghyadan (welcome to the bridegroom)

The marriage party is welcomed by the bride's parents and relatives.

2. Madhuparka

This is an auspicious drink made up of curd, honey and ghee. This is a sign of generosity; and this food has a nutritious value. All throughout the main concern is for mutual respect and peaceful coexistence in the society.

3. Kanya Daan : Acceptance of the bride.

Here, the father of the bride gives her to the groom. The latter takes the promise to be true to her in many respects but the following three are the most important aims of life - Piety, Wealth and Pleasure.

4. Panigrahan - Taking of vow

The groom, holding the bride's hand, promises to make her "Queen of my home" and presents to her gifts which will be his long life duty. Both promise to remain faithful to each other and perform all duties normally assigned to a householder.

5. Shilarohan - mounting of the stone.

In this ceremony, the bride mounts a stone and she is advised to be "Firm like a rock." This is highly symbolical. Family -life may be upset by ups and downs, joys and sorrows, but the householder is given the advice to stand firm and unshaken in the midst of any kind of difficulties.

6. Lajhoma - offering of roasted-rice in the fire.

With the join palms, both put roasted rice in the sacred fire, the bride prays for her husband's long life and for the prosperity in her new home. They take the vow to provide everybody with the minimum comforts.

Pradakshina and Saptapadi - circumambulate the fire and the seven steps.

The bride and the groom, now joined by knotted garments, circumambulate the sacred fire, the groom usually leading. Here the idea is to be pure, humble, cool and sincere to each other. The knotted garments indicate that they have now become one - in mind, body and soul.

Then, they take seven steps praying to lead a prosperous married life, with the wish to be provided with

(i) food
(ii) Strength
(iii) Wealth and prosperity
(iv) Wisdom and knowledge
(v) Child - to pay the Pitri Rinas
(vi) Health
(vii) Mutual understanding between them.

The different items associated show that the couple aspire to live a life of purity, piousness, peace and co-operation. Union and prosperity therefore become the ultimate end of life.

Surya and Dhruva Darhsan - Gazing at the sun and pole star

If the marriage takes place at night, the groom points to the Pole Star, and

asks his bride to be constant like it. If the ceremony is held during the day, they gaze at the sun and pray. They touch each other's heart. Then the father, relatives, elders, friends and guests bless them. The father gives her sweet advice and blesses her to be "mother of heroic sons."

Many people after returning home ask the pair to worship the domestic fire. In the Vedic Age, the couple had to remain continent for three nights and could consummate their marriage on the fourth night after the rite of conception.

Vivaha means 'support'. It is a ceremony that prepares a couple to support each other and to live by Dharma. Moreover, two instincts are regulated, two minds are brought together, are united to found a home, to procreate and educate children and help to make the world moves for thousand of years. In the Vivaha Samskara, Dharma predominates. It also indicates that tolerance, sacrifice, self-control, mutual respect are all important for a successful married life. It shows the greatness of Hinduism regarding life. This also marks a further development of human character 'which started developing even in the embryo'.

Vivaha Samskara is a good means to fulfil the four ends of life, and an institution for the regulation of proper relationships between the different members of the society.

Antyesti (funeral ceremony)

For many people, death like birth is believed to make the house impure and therefore proper ceremonies are performed to purify the house and help the onward progress of the departed soul. Some sacred books declare that mourners must not come into contact with outsiders for fear of polluting them, they must observe strict diet rules and sleep on the ground; they must not shave their hair or worship the gods till the proper ceremonies have been performed. Many persons also believe that too many tears may prevent the onward march of the soul. This is why sacred books are read to comfort the relatives and make them forget their sorrow.

The funeral ceremony is the last samskara in a man's life. In ancient India, the corpse was carried to the burning ground as soon as possible after death, followed by the mourners, the eldest leading. It was cremated while sacred verses would be recited. The mourners circumambulated the pyre, not in the auspicious clockwise direction but anti-clockwise. They then bathed in the nearest river or lake and returned home, this time led by the youngest. On the third day after the cremation, the charred bones of the dead were collected and thrown in a river, preferably the Ganga. Most of the above are observed up to now.

Followers of the Puranic tradition offer to the dead libations of water for ten days after the cremation. They also offer rice-balls (pinda) and milk in special vessels. The rite of the tenth day is very important for them as they believe the soul will acquire a subtle body with which it can continue its way, nourished by the pindas offered at the occasional Sraddha ceremonies. After the tenth day ceremony, the mourners cease to be impure and resume their normal lives. Arya Samajists do not believe in the above. They do yajna for two or more days after the cremation, dispose of the

bones on the third day and do no other ritual. They may give gifts for the propagation of the Vedas and similar activities.

MODERN AGE

If the Vedic age was the age of great traditions, social and economic stability; and spiritual fervour, the Modern age was a complete contrast to it. It was the period of utter darkness in all aspects of life. Degradation in the social fields, stagnancy and disintegration were noted in the cultural and religious fields. The Hindu society gave an importance to many practices on account of ignorance, superstitions, misinterpretation of Vedic religion, bad educational policy, distortion of knowledge and political confusions.

But,although this age shows degradation in many aspects of life, on the other hand, there was an effort to stop the decadence in the society by looking for efficient means to revive the glorious past of bygone ages. Socio-cultural movements and other great personalities shaped the destiny of India and Hinduism. Among the most prominent ones, we have *Ram Mohun Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Dayananda, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda* and *Mahatma Gandhi*. The *Brahmo Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission* and *Arya Samaj* did formidable works in various fields.

It is said that :

" Some advocated a return to the purity of the Vedic culture, which they idealized by abstraction. Others reacted by suggesting the adoption of the Western way; and still others, more electically-minded;

endeavoured to evolve a pattern which would include the good on both sides." (*K.C. Vyas* - Social Renaissance in India.)

During this age, the pictures one gets in the social scene were :

(1) Caste-system
(2) Untouchability
(3) Ban or foreign travel
(4) Child marriage
(5) Sati
(6) Education only to priviledged class
(7) Dowry

In the religious field we saw :

(A) Idol worship
(B) Costly and unnecessary rites and rituals
(C) Pilgrimages
(D) Animal sacrifice
(E) Sectarian beliefs
(F) Compulsory performance of *Shraddha* ceremony
(G) Puranika Hinduism has ursurped Vedic Hinduism.

It is on account of these that the reformers raised their voice willing to give Hinduism a new direction. Most of them were successful in spite of their limitations and persecutions.

KESHAB CHANDRA SEN

Keshab Chandra Sen is one of the striking personalities who fashioned this present age in a very colourful way. He was born *19th november 1838* in Calcutta. His parents enjoyed a respectable position and *K.C. Sen* was himself provided with the basic education befitting his father's status. He was not only intelligent, but simple, convinced of morality, full of noble qualities and free from vices. His educational career was successful and had a spiritual bent of mind. He was deeply influenced by Christianity which later had a great impact in his life and campaigns. He was married in 1856 to a village girl of about 8 or 10 years . His relationship with the wife was different. He showed great organisational skills and in a *1857*, he formed the British India Society, which aimed to discuss ' the culture of Literature and Science'. His contacts with the leading personalities and western theology had had a prevailing influence in life. In *1857*, he joined the *Brahmo Samaj*. His objectives were to establish a new identity for himself. His vast knowledge was helpful for him to project his ideas and he believed that Brahmo Samaj was the gateway to exhibit his aims both socially and spiritually. Brahmo Samaj, after the death of *Ram Mohun Roy*, suffered a series of set-back. The main teachings of the Brahmo Samaj were either ridiculed by the orthodox priest or Christian missionaries. In *1859* he became the secretary of the Brahmo Samaj. He started the *Sangat Sabha* in the samaj. His great aim was to establish a society in which spirituality and service would be the primary goals.

He issued many *tracts* to illustrate his views. Moreover, he used the missionary systen to popularise the main teachings of Brahmo Samaj. He was successful in his tour preaching the doctrines of Brahmo Samaj. But, gradually, the relationship between *Devendranath Tagore* with whom he had a

great respect, starting deteriorating. The schism grew and a turning point in their relationship aggravated in *October 1864*,when he performed an inter-caste and widow marriage. Very often *K.C. Sen* had rifts and the other members disapproved his ideas. The conflict in the Brahmo Samaj was between two opposite factions and two personalities as well. *Keshab* was for radical changes in the samaj. Finally, he left the Samaj and published a tract in *July 1865* "An appeal to young India" in which he exposed his ideas saying that the root of all evils was idolatry, caste, marriage-customs and inferior status of women. He was now free to go ahead in his move. His *Brahmo Samaj* of India was now established.

Keshab Chandra Sen and his followers adopted the Christians beliefs and outlook so much, that many believed that he would be embracing Christianity, but that was not the case. But,later, he hailed *Jesus Christ* and this had a considerable effect on the mind of the people. In exposing his views, he would say that this Samaj did not require any human head, as God alone was its head. He published *Shloka Sangraha* outlining his views which included references from *Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Chinese* and *Muslim* religions so as to make his ideas popular, he applied the *Vaisnava* mode of Bhakti. Many of his friends would even go and performed *Nagar Kirtan*- street-singing doing bhajans and other such kinds of religious activities. All these made him popular but totally different from the original Brahmo Samaj, founded by *Roy.*

Gradually , K.C. Sen was hailed as Divine origin. He considered himself to be acting on the pattern of a divine message. This brought conflict among his followers, but the most significant point of content was the marriage of his daughter under-age to the prince *Cooch.* He accepted this child-marriage although the Brahmo Samaj had always been against it. He argued

that it was a divine sanction- *Adesha*. Many of his followers disapproved it and deserted him. This proved fatal to him and his health started deteriorating.

After his recovery , he started his missionary work with new zeal. In order to popularise his thoughts and his Samaj, his dream was to bring unity of all religions, thus making himself a prophet of a Universal religion with all its necessary features that would satisfy the majority of people. By now, his views were completely changed and he wanted people to call his Brahmo Samaj-"*the church of new dispensation-Nava Vidhan*" whose leader he was under divinely proclaim.

He was influenced by many other personalities, but *Ramakrishna Paramhansa* had a pervading influence on his life and teachings. While analysing his religious attitudes, we find the emotions of Vaisnava traditions, the rational elements of the Brahmo Samaj, the mystical teachings of the Vedanta tradition and the supernaturalism of Christianity. His attempts to bring a synthesis of all these religions could not be successful but there is no doubt that he played a very important role in the development of Hinduism. He achieved a lot during his age and gave a new a direction to the society. He gave new impetus to the intellectual and social activity. He freed the Hindu society from stagnancy and had contributed immensely in many fields- education, social, religious reform and national awareness.

RAM MOHUN ROY

Modern age ushered a new era in the history of Hinduism. It was an age which witnessed new elements in India and Hinduism. The first and foremost leader of the present Hindu renaissance is no doubt *Ram Mohun Roy*. His ideals, reforms and ideas paved the way for a dynamic India and largely purified Hinduism of its ills and orthodox beliefs. When, we cast a glance on his life and teachings, we see that he had not left untouched the major problems that affected his society. Thus, he is rightly called by many '*Father of Hindu Renaissance*' or '*Morning Star of Hinduism*'. His *Brahmo Samaj* did commendable works in the social as well as spiritual fields not to forget his political and administrative reforms in many spheres.

He was born on *May 22, 1772*. His parents enjoyed good social status and he had been brought in a religious atmosphere. His father wanted him to be given an education that would make him not only a duteous son but a responsible citizen. Thus, he studied Sanskrit, Bengali and Persian. Later, he became very proficient in English as well as in Arabic. He had a prodigious memory. In his early age, he was able to have a broad idea of Vedic and Arabic literature. He developed a very critical approach in his life. *Roy* was made of a different stuff, he rejected all blind orthodoxy and when his parents saw his revolutionary attitudes in matters of religion, they were greatly alarmed. He was married and after the death of his first wife, he married once again and he, later, lived with two wives. He experienced the evil of polygamy.

At a very young age, he started writing on many issues that were topics of the day. His revolutionary ideas led to a rift with the parents. Contacts with the external worlds and his mastery of the rich cultural heritage of

India made him a great exponent of a modern approach to religion and culture of India and Hinduism.

Around *1804*, he wrote about the practice of Idolatry and severely criticised the malpractices in the religion. He went on writing on different issues. Thus, in a very short span of time, he fought against all that were anti-social and anti-religious. Reforms brought by *Ram Mohun Roy* were on the following issues: *Sati, polygamy, caste system, base attitudes on women and education*; rites and rituals; belief in many gods and *superstitious attitudes in religion.*

Social Reforms

One of the most outrageous evils of this age was the practice of *Sati*, considered by orthodox Hindus as an example of conjugal love. Some people had advanced arguments stating that it is an old practice of Hinduism, but *Roy* showed that it was wrong to believe in such a malpractice. For Roy, this was not only anti-social, but a cruel act and opposed the inhumanity of the custom. He also felt its barbarous and base consequences.

The campaign against it started around *1818 A.D.* In order to raise the feelings of his countrymen, he used pamphlets. He gave many arguments in favour of its abolition. As a lawyer, he knew well the means to fight against it. His great respect for women was enough to reject this practice. Giving a correct interpretation of the scriptures, he disapproved the '*sati*' system.

His campaign bore fruits years later when he was backed by the Govern-

ment with the special contribution of Lord William Bentinck. In spite of the persecution by orthodox priests, he achieved success. The disgrace of the Hindu women was removed to a large extent by him. His name will be remembered for a long time for this great humanitarian task.

The sorry plight of women in India at a certain age has always appealed to reformers and *Roy* was one of the rare personalities who ventured to look into the problem from different angles. Using the Hindu scriptures as support, he reacted vehemently against it. As regards polygamy, he said that the Hindus were wrong to give this practice importance. Some Hindu scriptures approved it under specific conditions. Two very important papers on "*Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females in 1822*" and on "*the Rights of Hindus over Ancestral property*" *in 1838* show his views on polygamy and the Hindu women. He worked seriously for the upliftment of women. The achievement of Roy in this field is still felt. His views awakened the Hindus and today women enjoy a privileged position in the society.

The *Vedic Varna dharma* was established for the smooth functioning of the Hindu Society but, when some people started abusing of their position or status, it led to a series of malpractices. Caste system based on privileges, and untouchability were the significant features of Hindu society during his age. As a great social-evil, he felt its deleterious effects on the social and political life. Its rigidity led to a series of evils as well progress could not be achieved, Education was limited to higher classes only and was the cause of the degradation of the Hindus. His contributions in this field are that he favoured inter-caste marriage; purity of character and equality of all beings and a synthesis of the Eastern and Western social idealism. The changes he brought in this field helped enormously in the economic

stability, social cohesion, political unity and spiritual upliftment. In this way, *Ram Mohun Roy* favoured a strong Hindu society based on mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence and religious purity.

Religious Reforms

Ram Mohun Roy revolutionized the Hindu society by his scientific and pragmatic ideals. As the '*Maker of Modern India*', he attempted to re-form the society from the *existing evils.* He himself was well-versed in Hindu scriptures. In '*Abridgement of the* Vedanta', he showed his anxiety on issues like the importance given to costly rites and rituals; idol worship, superstitious belief in matter of religion; sectarian beliefs and so on. He raised his voice against all these so as to purify Hinduism and restore its original purity.

He used the Upanishads and Brahma Sutras as the basis of his religious ideals. In the Vedic Religion, God is conceived to be One having the characteristics of Omnipotence, Omniscience and Omnipresence. He has no forms, no names and no attributes. In the Upanishads, the unity of all beings is focused everywhere. His "A Gift to the Believers in the One God" gives us a clear idea of his view on religion as practised. In it, he analyses the distinguishing features of the sectarian beliefs and all superstitious elements in them; he speaks about *One Supreme Being*, condemning all superstitious beliefs associated with religion.

For him, religion and morality go side by side. He published many works to illustrate his ideas. For his grand ideals, he was severely attacked by

many, but he never lost hope and continued his crusade against the religious barbarism. In almost all his works, one could see that he lays emphasis on the existence of God as "*Almighty and Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the World.*" He also wrote about *Maya* or the Sports of God, and considered the world to be a product of *Maya.*

For him, true worship consists of discipline, pursuit of true knowledge; service, unity, love and pure devotion. His views were above dogmas. He had a broad view of all the existing religions of his days. He felt that the worshippers or devotees should be guided properly and the meaning of different texts or prayers must be given. To this end, he himself translated many texts. In order to infuse confidence in the followers and public in general , he named his Samaj - *Brahmo Samaj*.

The Samaj started its activities in *August 1824*. Gradually, a stir was noted in the Hindu society. Many people reacted against it, but the vitality and dynamism of *Roy* and his followers were such that they continued on their onward march without any hesitation and fear of persecution. The principles of the Samaj can be summarized as:
"A place of public meeting of all sorts where everybody irrespective of caste, creed and sex could meet without distinctions; where worship would be offered in a simple and pure way to God who is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient, who has no name or attribute, where image or statue, painting worship would not be allowed, where no offerings would be permitted, but where morality, charity, piety, benevolence, virtues, unity and service would be primary."

For him, true worship means the knowledge of the true picture of God and

contemplating on His nature. His *Brahmo Samaj* was a place of unity of all worshippers. He was himself a living picture of deep emotions, rationality and the champion of Hinduism.

He sacrificed his life with great zeal and love. The following verses summarize his entire view on religion: "Meditate on the Only One who pervades land, water and air, who has created this universe of which there is no bound. He knows all, but we can know Him . He is the Lord of Lords, the God of Gods, the Master of Masters, Let us know this adorable One."

His Brahmo Samaj, which we should not ignore, did commendable works in spreading Hindu culture.

In order to make India strong, Hinduism dynamic, and regain its original purity he spoke about religious synthesis. He also believed in the freedom of press. He was for an educational policy that could give India and Hindus in particular the opportunity to have educational facilities, extended to everybody. He strongly recommended that by ensuring education, the society will get rid of its traditional ills.

He brought changes by developing a synthesis of the best of the East and West. The establishment of Anglo-Hindu school, Vedanta College and other leading institutions were the fruits of the labour of *Roy*. Gradually, India enjoyed a free press, development of literature and a sound educational system which no doubt, provided India and Hinduism to develop on pragmatic, scientific lines.

Ram Mohun Roy, undoubtedly, played significant role in the development

of Hinduism. He himself was proud to belong to this ancient great religion. He felt that Hinduism could still inspire the entire humanity if all the blind, orthodox, superstitious beliefs were eliminated. Today, the zeal of Roy cannot be ignored. He brought about many changes which bore their results later. He deserved to be called "the *Father of Hindu Renaissance.*" His death was a blow, but his followers continued his works.

Swami Dayananda

While going through the history of Modern India, we can see that it was a period of utter darkness in the cultural, social and religious fields. During this age, evil pracitices had already sapped the vitality and greatness of Hinduism. One of the brightest and illustrious personalities that shaped the destiny of Modern India and Hinduism in general is *Swami Dayananda.* It is said that "he has done more for the social, moral and intellectual uplift of the country than all other reformers put together". An assessment of his works shows that he deserved to be called *'Architect of Modern India' and the 'Champion of Hinduism'.* If for some he was *'a soldier of light* *.... a bold and ragged victor of the difficulties which matter present to spirit',* for another he is "*a ruthless critic of all, who, according to him, had falsified or profaned the true Vedic religion.*"

Swami Dayananda was born in 1824 at Tankara, Gujrat, India. His childhood's name was *Moolshankar.* His parents were *Shaivas* and pious *Brahmana.* Very precocious as a child, at a very young age (14) he had learnt by heart the whole of Yajur Veda and portion of some other Vedas. He was also quite proficient in *Sanskrit* grammar. It is said that two memorable events changed his life. Firstly the *Shiva Ratri* incident - As an ar-

dent *Shaivite,* his father advised him that he should fast on Shiva Ratri and also keep the night-long vigil in the temple of *Shiva*. By so doing, he would not only keep the family tradition but reap the blessing of Lord Shiva. The young devotee took the worship with all his heart, but in the middle of the night, when everybody fell asleep, he kept awake. Suddenly, he saw a mouse creeping out of its hole and climbing the image of Shiva, and eating the offerings, thus defiling the shrine. *Moolshankar* was astonished.

He started thinking and questioned himself "Could this image that was unable to protect itself against a tiny creature be real *Mahadeva?* Thus, he awoke his father and asked his father about it, but when he did not get an answer which could give him satisfaction, he broke his fast and went at home. He was disturbed and pondered. What is the real *Shiva*? The second incident had deeply affected him was the death of his sister and uncle. So, he went on thinking: What is life? What is death? Why do we live? These are leading questions of Hinduism, which all great teachers of Hinduism went in search of.

When his parents saw his spiritual views, they decided to marry him. But he renounced the world, in search of true knowledge. He met many teachers with whom he learnt a lot, but in *1860,* he met his real *Guru.* It was *Swami Virjananda Dandi,* himself blind. It was the meeting of two great souls - an able teacher and an able disciple.

He stayed about *three years* at his feet, learning a lot from him. While taking his leave, he could offer him only a seer of cloves as *Gurudakshina*, but the Guru asked for his life. He requested him to "vow that even at the cost of his life, he will not flinch in dispelling darkness and establishing the

supremacy of the Vedas. *Dayananda* took this *supreme vow* and he left *Mathura* with his Guru's blessings to fulfil his Guru's wish. Then, after a few years of preparation, he started preaching a *Kumbha Mela.* In order to spread his teachings and views, he used the method called *shastrarthas* - Religious discussions and , very often, defeated his opponents with his strong arguments. The most famous is the one held at *Kashi* - Banaras held in *1869;* here he successfully defeated *300* leading pandits. He proved them wrong and then onwards became famous.

In 1872, he met *Ramakrishna* and leaders of *Brahmo Samaj. Keshab* advised him to preach in *Hindi* instead of *Sanskrit.* Thus, he became popular as he was understood by the majority of people. He toured all over India (except South). Gradually, he got many admirers accepting his views. On *10th April 1875*, he founded the *Arya Samaj* in Bombay. Although, he was given poison, he resisted it, but the last one proved fatal and on 30 *October 1883*, attained *Nirvana.* His last words after *Gayatri Mantra* were "Lord, it will be done". He wrote many books but - *Satyartha Prakash* - "Light of Truth", *Samskara Vidhi* - "The procedure of sacraments; and Commentaries on the Vedas are the most important.`

Satyartha Prakash constitutes the *'Master-peiece'* of *Swami Dayananda.* This book was written with the idea of giving a true picture of Hindu religion and to speak against the current of thoughts that give Hinduism a bad picture. The book may be briefly viewed under the philosophy he proclaims, his code of *Ethics, Nature of God, his views of the different religions, the important teachings of the Vedas.*

Dayananda got immense success and his *Arya Samaj* and teachings became popular. By his authoritative books, his fiery and powerful speeches,

his formidable *Shastrarthas, Swami Dayananda* revolutionized the Hindu society and gave it a new orientation. As a great seer, he is considered to be "*the first architect of Modern India*". He sincerely believed in the lofty and sublime teachings of the Vedas. With his practice of '*Swadesi*', his social reforms, religious practices and many such other beliefs, he is rightly called by many as the '*forerunner of Mahatma Gandhi*'. Inspite of having an education based on the pure ideals of Hinduism, *Dayananda* raised the moral of the English-educated youths. He showed them the right path. He brought them together and proved to them that the missionaries were wrong; superstitious beliefs had no sanction in Hinduism and they can practise without any doubt the lofty ideals of Hinduism. Whatever evil practices the Hindus had grown in were the result of ignorance, the greed of the priestly class, foreign dominion and above all the rejection of the Vedic teachings.

He showed the Indian princes the true aspect of government and advised them to be united and rule justly. His message: "*Self-rule is far the best*" bore its fruits at last. This was the seed for the liberation of India years later. He wanted to bring reforms to make India strong, Hinduism dynamic. Moreover, his '*Back to the Vedas*' implied '*India for the Indians*'.

The political confusions, centuries of foreign rule and all the evil practices were because of religious differences, lack of education and the rejection of the Vedas. In order to redress the situation, he laid down his life. *Swami Dayananda* was a true *Karma yogi*, although he was a *sanyasi*. He worked very hard for the salvation of mankind. Thus, as a humanist, he had at heart the welfare of man.

Dayananda's reforms have brought many changes in the Hindu society.

Many people did not accept all his reforms in the religious fields, but his social reforms are still accepted even to date. He was one of the rare personalities to have purified Hinduism. He is regarded to be the champion that Hinduism badly needed in a period when the Vedas were misinterpreted. He got rid of religious and social tyranny.

Undoubtedly, for his grand ideals, progressive practices and being against blind beliefs and orthodoxy, he himself and his followers were persecuted; but nevertheless, they never gave up. Today, Arya Samay holds a honorable and respectful place in Hinduism. *Arya Samaj* stands as a monument in the history of Hinduism. *Swami Dayananda's* teachings are accepted in many countries.

RELIGIOUS REFORMS

The contributions of *Swami Dayananda* in the field of *religion* are immense. His message "*Back to the Vedas*" was the clarion call. He stated that *India* and *Hinduism*, needed to return to the Vedas, which he considered as the earliest book of mankind. He held that *Hinduism* practised at that time was a degeneration of the one that existed in the *Vedic Age*. Practices like *idol-worship, animal sacrifices, pilgrimages, fasts, offering in temples in the honour of Shiva, Krishna* and other *deities* had never been sanctioned in the *Vedas*. Thus, he denounced them and said that they must not be done. Using the *Vedas* as the basis of his teachings, he held that the Vedas proclaim *ONE GOD*. He also rejected the theory of Avatara and the *Pauranika Hinduism*, as a matter of fact, he strove to replace the *Pauranika Hinduism* by *Vedic Hinduism*.

One of his greatest objectives was to revive the glories of *ancient India* as depicted in the *Vedas*. For him, *the Vedas are the words of God. Agni, Vayu, Aditya* and *Angira* were the four illustrated personalities to whom they were revealed. As they are the voice of God, they cannot contain any mistake and do not depend on any other book to prove their authority. Being *divine they* are *genuine, true* and *supreme.* He believed in the practice of *Yajna* which would help to attain or realise God. In his opinion,the *Vedas* are the seeds of all knowledge, the source of all teachings and principles related to the science of the mind to that of machines. In order to prove his arguments he quotes plenty of passages from the *Vedas* which deal with mathematics, astronomy, medicine, gravitation, ships, air planes and so on. He was able to infuse in the mind of the *Hindus* the scientific approach and teachings of the *Vedas*. Although, in the beginning, he was ridiculed for his ideals, gradually, they were accepted by a vast majority of the *Hindus.*

SOCIAL REFORMS

The *Vedic Age* was the glorious age for the *Hindus*. During this age, the *social life* knew *peace, stability, economic prosperity* and *political freedom*, but in the *Modern Era*, all these were lost as a matter of great ignorance. So, he wanted to bring back the glory of the *Vedic life* in the *social life* also. He also wished to re-establish the pure and bold life that the *Hindus* experienced before the *Mahabharata* war. He raised his voice against the *social-evils* like *child marriage, caste-system based on birth* and *untouchability, restriction on foreign travel* and *inter-dining*. He realised that people had come to believe in these ideas or practices because

they were ignorant. They believed that they had *Vedic sanction.* Thus, being *anti-Vedic* and *anti-social*, they had to be abandoned. He realised that *education* has a great importance, thus he advocated *the education of girls on the same footing as boys*, the *uplift of women*, *widow-remarriage*, *free movement on land and seas, social equality* and *economic well being of everybody.*

Three activities characterise the *Arya Samaj: Shuddhi, Sangathan* and *Education.*

SHUDDHI:

It simply means **purification**. The *Arya Samaj* ordained it to be used as a *purificatory ceremony* to convert *non-Hindus* to *Hinduism.* Thus, it was the proper means to enable the *Arya Samaj* not only to give the *sacred thread* to the *untouchables* but to make them equal to other *Hindus (reclamation)* as well, and also to bring new converts to *Hinduism (conversion)*. *Arya Samaj*, has in fact, revived this ancient practice.

SANGATHAN:

It means **Union**. This was used as a union for self-defence in the face of insults on *Hinduism* and to attack *religion* that had come to harm it. He defended *Hinduism* to give it self respect lost through ignorance and centuries of foreign rule.

EDUCATION:

As during his age *education* was confined only to *privileged classes* and

the *upper classes* only, he stressed the importance of national, education in his speeches and works. He urged the opening of *Vedic schools, Sanskrit College*, and the *teachings of the Vedas*. Its eighth principle declares: "Promote knowledge, dispel ignorance". He practised it with the opening of countless educational institutions. Thus, the *Arya Samaj* has its leading institutions - *D.A.V College* and *Gurukukla of Kangri*.

Undoubtedly, Swami Dayananda played a significant role in establishing a pure religion and brought the Hindus to understand their religion, culture and tradition well.

MAHATMA GANDHI

The renaissance of *Hinduism* started by *Ram Mohun Roy* was supported by *Ramakrishna, Tagore, Swami Dayananda* but attained its summit in the life and teachings of *Mahatma Gandhi*.

Mahatma Gandhi was born on 2nd October,1869 at *Porbandar*, Gujrat. His childhood was spent in a simple way and he showed keen interest in the application of *Truth* in all his activities. Thus, he was very religious and the *Ramayana* has inspired him a lot. He was married to *Kasturba* in 1883 but his married life much more a *spiritual relationship* rather than *physical.* In 1888, he left *India* for *London* to study Law. He became a barrister in 1893 and returned home. In London, he was amazed to see that many people were vegetarians. It is there that he read the *Bhagavata Gita* translated by *Sir Edwin Arnold.* This book greatly influenced his life and later he was called "*the living Gita*". In 1893, when he went in *South Africa*, he saw the *Indians* were baldly treated and thus decided to campaign against

their ill-treatment and racial discrimination. He stayed up to 1914 and changed the lives of the *Indians*. He paid a visit in *Mauritius* in 1901 and stayed for three weeks here. 12th March, 1930 is a remarkable day for the *Indians* in fact it was on that day,that he started the famous *Salt March (241 miles)* which later resulted in the *liberation of India* from *British rule*. 1931 was the year in which he attended the *Round Table Conference* in *London*. He was shot dead on 30th January 1948 and his last words were " *Hė Rama* ".

He is one of the greatest leaders that *Modern India* gave birth to. His teachings embody the *ancient teachings of Hinduism* but he applied them to satisfy the needs of the present age. Like, *Dayananda, Buddha* and other reformers, he rejected *dogmas*, *ritualistic* and *sacrificial form of religion*. Thus he made *Hinduism*, much more rational and practical which helped immensely in making it *broad, dynamic, tolerant, open* and *simple*. His life and teachings show that he was greatly influenced by many *scriptures*, and leading personalities of the world. In his opinion, *renunciation* stands as the highest form of *religion*.

Mahatma Gandhi wished to revive the core teachings of *Hinduism* like :

(1) The belief in the existence of *God*
(2) Karma and Rebirth
(3) The doctrine of Incarnation
(4) Non-violence - Ahimsa
(5) Truthfulness
(6) Celibacy - Brahmacharya
(7) Renunciation
(8) Varna Ashrama Dharma

(9) Nishkama Karma - disinterested action

(10) *God* and His multiple forms, sincerely believe that these elements have a great deal to contribute towards the welfare of everybody. He considered himself a " *Sanatani Hindu*" for many reasons. Some of them are related to his belief in the the *Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas,Avataras, Rebirth* and the credentials of *Hinduism*. For him Varna Ashrama Dharma must be applied as explained in the Vedas but not in the way people are practising today. He held the " cow protection" accepted by the majority of Hindus transcended the popular belief and agreed totally to the worship of idol. Thus, in his opinion, all the teachings of *Hinduism* are rational and based on *truth*. In fact, he popularised ideals that were either lost or degraded.

Gandhi's place in the development of Hinduism is unique. He came to interprete and apply the eternal truths of Hinduism for the benefit of mankind. As a great teacher of the same calibre of *Buddha*, Gandhi was himself a " *living example of Hinduism*". He made lots of efforts to give Hinduism a new direction and restored the prestige of its glorious past. *Truth* was his *God*; *non-violence* his creed and *non-attachment* his life.

CASTE SYSTEM AND GANDHI

Varna Dharma was framed for the establishment of a strong and dynamic society. Although, in the very beginning it contributed a lot, centuries later it developed into *caste*. *Varna* was originally based on *Karma-action*, but *caste* is based on *birth*. This led to a degradation in the organised *Hindu society*. In *Gandhi's* opinion, the original *Vedic conception* of *Varna dharma* is based much more on *spirutual economics*, *division of labour* and *equality of man* rather than superiority and inferiority. He held: "The *Varna*

Dharma is the law of spiritual ecomomics and has nothing to do with inferiority and superiority."

For *Gandhi*, everybody is equal and *God* is ever present in all. As such he declared how can there be any difference? The practice of *Varna* is based on *love, mutual understanding* and *co-operation* and openely rejects any violence or compulsion inflicted on men. The practice of *Varna Dharma* according to Him will help to preserve energy and will lead economic justice. Thus, he rejected the pratice of *untouchability*, which he considered to be " *a blot to Hinduism*"

He regarded *untouchability* as one of the greatest evils that *Hinduism* has given to. He declared that this unfair practice is slowing eating into the very vital of *Hinduism*. He proves to those who argue its practice that it has no sanction in the *Hindu scriptures*. The degeneration of *Varna Dharma* has led to *caste system* which had given undue importance to social status and privileges. The consequence of such an evil practice has led to the deprivation of the *low-class* the bare necessities of life, the practice of *religion* and made *religious scripture* unaccessible to them. He find it completely contradictory that a great *religion* like Hinduism strongly recommends *non-violence, Ahimsa*, does harm to its own followers - *the low class*. He brought changes in the mind of the oppressed which led to a social awakening of the depressed. He raised his voice against *untouchability*.

He is of opinion that *inter-dining* and *inter-marriage* must be practiced in a lustless way and without any selfish motive. By so doing, there will be *peaceful- co-existence* among the different classes which no doubt will be

beneficial to the *spiritual growth* of the society. Today the situation is that these restrictions are becoming less and less.

Gandhi fought hard against *untouchability.* He even fasted against it. He rejected arguments put forward by the *Pandits-Priests* to justify it. Later, Gandhi called the *untouchables 'Harijan' - Children of God'*. He accepted them in his *Ashrama* where they were treated with great respect. For him, the *Varna Dharma* enjoins that we should know our duties and we should never account for any priviledge. For him "*All are born to serve God's creation.*" The *Brahman* does it by *knowledge*, the *kshatriya* serves the society by his power for protection, the *Vaishya* contributes for the commercial and economic progress while the *Shudra* helps by *bodily labour*. The removal of *untouchability* is his greatest service to Hinduism for in case a *Brahman* dines with a *Shudra*, he remains a *Brahman*.

FASTING AND GANDHI

One of the most popular practices in Hinduism is "*fasting*". It has many implications but in *Gandhi's* teachings it has been given a new approach. Perhaps, it was used for the first time to correct socio-evils and political injustice. He applied it not only for the benefits of the individual but made it a collective practice.

Fasting is closely linked to prayer. It is *fast* that prepares man for *prayer*. *Gandhi* held that *fasting* is a great contribution of Hinduism to mankind, and no *prayer* can be done without *fasting* and *fasting* cannot be successful without *prayer*. Thus, *fasting* is a *spiritual act*, and the strong gearing of the soul to merge with *God*. ; Eventually, *fasting* does not only mean to

abstain from food but it also consists in having proper control of the *senses* and *organs*.

He recommended that *fasting* may be undertaken to correct political wrongs and shows solidarity to one's own friend or co-worker. He also uses it as a form of *Satyagraha*. *Fasting* is therefore not only eliminating impurities but *realisation* and *purification* as well. Thus, we see that *Gandhi* made *fasting* an appropriate mean for correction evils that had doomed *Hinduism*.

SATYA - TRUTH AND GANDHI

The word *Satya* comes from '*sat*' which means "that which exists". For *Gandhi, Truth* is equated to *God*. *Truth* leads to *knowledge*, that is why in *Hinduism*, there is the belief in *Sat-Chit-Ananda* which means the *one* combining Himself with *Truth, Knowledge* and *Bliss*. Thus *Satya* is an important ideal in *Gandhi's* teachings.

The practice of *Satya* leads to truthfulness in *thought, speech* and *action*. *Truthfulness* means to be pure and honest in our thinking practice. One's objective must be to put into practice *Truth* with great determination. It also implies that *Truth* must be spoken pleasantly avoiding unpleasant, frivolous talks, bickerings, back-bitting and harsh words. All of our actions should be motivated by *Truth*, as the search of *truth* is possible only with *self-sacrifice, control* and *sincerity*. Thus, *Satyagraha* is one of his great teachings.

SATYAGRAHA

Satyagraha stands as the greatest contribution of *Mahatma Gandhi*. It is believed that the practice of *Satyagraha* which started in *South Africa*, got its strength in *India*. He applied it to his *non-violent*-struggle and *Satyagraha* means *Truth Force*, *Love Force* and *Soul Force*. It is generally, based on *Love* and the *Divine spirit* in all. According to *Gandhi*, the aim of the *Satyagrahi* is not to crush the opponent but to change him through the suffering-endured by oneself. The one practising *Satyagraha* - *a satyagrahi* must always be trusted rather than feared, because he considered *"fearlessness"* a great virtue; that *Hinduism* lays emphasis on.

Satyagraha takes the form of *non-co-operation* with any evil method or system, thus the *Satyagrahi* is advised not to co-operate with such method. He states that the *Satyagrahi* should not oppose the evil-doer but the evil and advise him to correct his practices.

Fasting is closely linked with *Satyagraha*, as *Gandhi* fasted on several occasions to remove evils from the society. If any individual has by mistake any wrong done, he may fast to purify himself. Moreover, *devotion* is a key element associated with *fasting*. *Satyagraha* must be always practised as a last resort. He cautions us never to use it for personal use.

In *India*, during this age *British rule* was at its peak and in the political spheres many evils were noted, and *Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha* was the form of *Civil Disobedience*. Thus, when all democratic principles attitudes fail, then it is used as mass resistance and opposition. Undoubtedly, *Satyagraha* is a new technique used to correct inegalities in the society, to provide *mobility, peace, cohesion* at all levels. *Satyagraha,* is thus

a step further to recognition of *Hindu values* towards social cohabitation, economic prosperity and political stability.

AHIMSA - NON - VIOLENCE

Ahimsa is a core teaching of *Hinduism* standing as among the primary objectives of any *Hindu*. In *Gandhi's* teachings, it has taken a new form. His belief in unity of all-beings leads to the idea of *brotherhood, equality, justice, love, kindness* and wherever such ideals are in force, there *Non-Violence* has no place. In his opinion, *Non-Violence* is a vision and a way of life that extends to every being in the world. Thus for him *Non-Violence* is the best form of life and it needs a lot of sacrifice. According to him, if one decides to practice *Ahimsa*, one must bear in mind certain important elements like:

"Such an individual must believe in *God* because He is the only *Truth*. He must therefore sincerely believe in the credibility and effectiveness of *Truth* and *Non-Violence* so as to show *love* and be *benevolent* in all spheres of life. A chaste life and non-attached life is extremely important for a non-violent man. In no case, should he use drugs or toxic foods. He must also always accept to live according to time. The application of *Non-Violence* in our life depends how much we can understand our purpose in life because non-violence has the potentialities to convert the evil-doer into a pure individual, understanding that he is a spirit in nature rather than a physical being."

The practice of *Non-Violence* leads to have a better understanding of life and develop a positive attitude to it so that one may develop *universal love*. It requires a lot of discipline, training and can be applied in all spheres.

He would say:

"The Rishis who discovered the Law of non-violence in the midst of violence, were greater than Newton."

Ahimsa was given a new spirit in the life and teachings of *Mahatma Gandhi*. It immensely helped towards restoration of peace and stability. It was one of the means that he used to infuse the idea of peaceful co-exitence in *India*. Today, *Ahimsa*, as practised by *Gandhi*, has its place in a world shattered by war and internal conflicts.

SWADESHI

He applied *Swadeshi* to show that all *religions* are true and there *religious* toleration is important to live peacefully. Thus, he was against conversion by *Christian Missionaries*. The practice of *Swadeshi* implies that everybody should be loved and respected. He enjoined the *Indians* to give importance to local good food and ideals.

BRAHMACHARYA - Chastity

Brahmacharya is given an important place in *Hinduism*. It means control over the senses in *thought*, *word* and *deed*. It also signifies the attempt to realise *God* or *Truth*. For *Gandhi*, if we have control over our *senses* and *mind*, we will definitely lead a more meaningful life through a proper control of our palate, listening to noble teachings of *saints* and *sages*. This will gradually, help us to eliminate all ugly aspects of life.

Thus, we would concentrate our energy to *right speech, right action* and *right means of livelihood.* He lays emphasis on a proper understanding of the concept. He said that not only students should practice it but the householder should equally give importance to it. With self-control one purifies one's being. *Self-indulgence* should be avoided and every individual should think that he is *divine* first and a *physical being* last. He would also advise to be *pious, faithful, truthful* and *sincere* in all our undertakings. According to him the individual who works for the upliftment of humanity, can never have time for *self-indulgence*.

FEARLESSNESS

The one who believes in *God* cannot be afraid of anything. Thus, all virtuous persons will shed fear. *Fearlessness* is a great sign for *self-purification.* If *truth* is the motive, *fear* cannot grow in us. The *fearless* person is always *humble, simple, loving* and *selfless*. It is through such practices that one becomes nearer to God. Thus, *fearlessness* is broadened in his teachings.

Bhagavata Gita, Upanishads and *Ramayana* of *Tulsidas* have all had a pervading influence in the life of *Mahatma Gandhi*. He declared that :

"After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that

(1) All religions are true ;

(2) All religions have some error in them;

(3) All religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close

relatives."

" Gita is a Universal Mother. She turns away nobody . Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of Gita does not know what disappointment is. He ever lives in perennial joy that passeth understanding."

Mahatma Gandhi stands as a unique personality in the development of *Hindiusm* as he used almost all main teachings of *Hinduism* giving them a new approach, giving *Hinduism* a new dynamism that *Hinduism* badly needed. Today he holds a very respectful place not only in *Hinduism* but in the world history as well.

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMHANSA

The life and teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansa fully illustrate how the Vedic teachings are eternal and practical."Truth is one,though sages call it by different names"was experienced by him.He was born on 18th February 1836 at Kamarpukar, in a village in Bengal. He was very precocious as a child and his life showed that he had wonderful powers of memory.Since his early childhood,he showed keen interest in religious books and stories.He was initiated at the age of nine and then he worked as priest. At the age of sixteen,he went to help his brother Ramkumar as an assistant priest in Calcutta.He did not like" a bread winning education" instead he felt that he was more inclined for life.Thus,he dedicated all his energy to the worship of God. He believed that Kali was the "mother of the universe." Ramakrishna was both a devotee as well as a spiritual master. He believed that God was both Saguna, and Nirguna.Both the householder and the life of renunciation are equally important.He is a unique figure of Modern Hinduism.Thus,the catholicity of Hinduism was practiced by this great personality.

At the temple of Dakshineshwar, he never considered the statue of Kali as a mere stone but a living form of the Mother.As a priest he was much unlike others.For, him the worship of Mother Kali does not require rituals but he visualised Her as a real and true Mother .Thus, he would talk to Her, laugh, joke, dance with Her and sometimes, he would put food in Her mouth to eat.

He would sit for long hours in meditation and longed to see Her.Very often, he would cry for a sight of Her and if in the evening he would not have a vision of the mother, he would cry: "another day is gone in vain

Mother , another day of this short life has passed and I have not seen truth."Seeing this attitude of Ramakrishna, many people considered him to be mad, but this was the sign of extreme devotion.He never lost hope and continued to worship Mother Kali with the same devotion, faith and sincerity.He continued his spiritual sadhana-disciplines and he was rewarded by a vision of the Mother. This was the first step in the ladder of this great spiritual achievement.

In 1856,he did intense sadhana for Hanuman and as usaual showed great care,dedication and sincerity in his worship .Thus ,he prayed to Him,implored Him in thousand of ways and even identified himself as a monkey,eating fruits,jumping from branch to branch. Finally,he was rewarded by the vision of Mother in the form of Sita.His success knew no bound,and he continued his search,and he went in his experiments, one path after another.He redoubled his efforts,practised Hatha Yoga,even meditated naked on the cremation ground imploring the Mother for continuous vision and help.

Finally,Mother Kali, granted his prayer and a Guru was sent to him in 1861.It was a great Yogini,a lady called Bhairavi Brahmini who was an adept in the Tantrika and Vaishnava sadhana.After getting a description of his past experiences and visions,she declared that Ramakrishna was not a mad man but an advanced spiritual seeker.His great devotion and deep faith in religion influenced her decision and thus she decided to stay for a longer period with him.Thus,she stayed for three years with him teaching him(1) Tantrika sadhana. This helped him to have the vision of the Mother as Shakti or the creative power of the universe.He also learnt from her the techniques of Kundalini Shakti or serpent power.(2)Vaishanava sadhana. Here, the devotee regards God as his parents,master,friend,child,husband

or sweetheart,all in ascending order of intensity.Ramakrishna made strenuous efforts and practiced all these disciplines and finally got the vision of Rama and Krishna.Seeing the quick progress of this great personality,she was not only astonished but happy and proud of him.

Ramakrishna was not exhausted.He wanted to know more.In 1864,the gracious Mother sent him another Guru called Totapuri.He gave him sanyasa and was then onwards called Paramhansa (one belonging to the higest order of sanyasi - one in highest state of consciousness.)He initiated him in the Advaita Vedanta which enabled him to experience God in his Impersonal aspect and entered into Nirvikalpa samadhi in which he stayed for three days.His Guru was astonished by this great achievement of Ramakrishna. Thereupon, he decided to stay for a few months more with him.He came to the conclusion that both Personal and Impersonal Brahman are the same and were also a living image of the Mother.

When Totapuri left him,Ramakrishana went in Nirvikalpa samadhi for about six months.For many he was dead,but a monk knew that he was undergoing a spiritual experience.It is recorded that the Mother advised him to stay on the threshold of relative consciousness for the sake of humanity.The experiences he had, confirmed the Vedic teaching:"Truth is one though sages call it by different names "as after starting Islamic sadhana he had the vision of the Holy Prophet, and eight years later he had the vision of Christ. He not only successfully "experienced God in His various forms"but at the same time proved that all religions are true.

His marriage with Saradamani was a purely spiritual one and accepted her as the will of the Mother.She was guided in every aspects of life "from house-keeping to the knowledge of Brahman." Later,she became his first

disciple.For him,she was the "Holy Mother,"the visible representative of the Mother.

Later,he began to meet spiritual seekers ,aspirants and religious leaders.He even performed a pilgrimage to the holy places in India.He also met leaders of the Brahma Samaj which was a turning point in his life.In fact,after this he yearned for disciples and as from 1879 he had many followers.As a great spiritual master he trained them with patience,love and motherly care and love.His most famous disciple was Narendranath who later became popular as Swami Vivekananda.

Ramakrishna attained liberation in 1886. Today, we have many of his followers.Ramakrishna Mission is not only a religious institution but a humanitarian organisation helping the poor and needy in case of famine,earthquakes and other calamities.

For Ramakrishna,the essence of religion is the realisation of God and as soon as realisation begins,sermons and books have no use.He argues that the one who has attained liberation connot quarrel about religion as all religions have the same goal and thus echoed the Vedic teachings that God is one,but can be approached in different ways.Realisation is possible by the practice of Bhakti, Karma and Jnana but in his opinion Bhakti is the easiest.The Mother's grace and love will lead the devotees to renunciation,good works,knowledge and realisatoin.Thus,he strongly recommends the worship of the Mother.

Moreover,he rejected hair -splitting questions that the Brahmo Samaj used :"Is God with forms or without forms."He advises us to surrender everything to God because the love of God must be our first objective.He

used to say "God first and goods works next."Thus, he wanted man to be pure first,avoiding lust,greed and passion before he tries to help others.Service is a better form to realisation.With such ideas in mind,corrupt practices will not be possible.He advised the householders to do their duties on one hand and be devoted fully to God on the other.He asks monks as well as others to "shun woman and gold."According to him,both householder and sanyasin have their importance.He did not like people who considered themselves as miserable and sinner.He would say:"If you think you are a sinner,you will really become a sinner,"as the Vedas say that we are "children of Immortal Bliss."

While going through his life and teachings,we can say that he has a message for all of us.Thus,his importance lies in the fact that he declared that all religions are true and are based or connected with different names given to the same one God.His sadhanas within Hinduism in the Vaishnanava Tantra,Vedanta styles and without Hinduism in Islamic and Christian ways were all successful.He tested and lived all faiths and was the first modern teacher to preach the harmony of religions.This is quite important for us today when we see the world shattered in the name of religion,where peaceful co-existence is only in name in many places.

He, thus,affirmed the truths of Hinduism that the Vedas and the Upanishads preach by his own experience,He proclaimed one more to the world that Hinduism is true for all time and stands as a great religion.

He also showed that Brahmao Samaj was wrong in speaking against what is called Hindu idolatry.He showed the English educated youths the true face of Hinduism and this helped a lot to prevent many from joining

the Christian-based reform movement.He restored to Hinduism its old prestige and started a movement that effectively launched the present Hindu Renaissance.His instrument for the purpose was his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda.

When he was asked about how he felt in Samadhi,he answered :"Do you know what I experience?It is as if a live fish had been released from a pot of water into the Ganges."A boat may stay in water but water must not stay in the boat.An aspirant may live in the world but the world shoud not live in him.When shall I be free?When "I" shall cease to be. .Many are the names of God and infinite the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form He is worshipped ,the one who has complete faith in Him will be granted the divine vision.

Ramakrishana is a unique personality that this age has produced.His life and teachings are still valid today and will no doubt continue to inspire lots of people throughout the world.

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